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**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LUTHER'S THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS
FOR CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL AND CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGIES**

Gordon A. Jensen

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Theology**

**University of St. Michael's College
Toronto School of Theology
Toronto, Ontario
1992**

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THESIS ABSTRACT

The Significance of Luther's Theology of the Cross for Contemporary Political and Contextual Theologies

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The purpose of this thesis is twofold. First, it examines the Christology and the method of Luther's *theologia crucis* within its historical and theological context. Second, four contemporary North American theologies are studied, using Luther's *theologia crucis* as the basis for analysis.

The first chapter explores some antecedents for Luther's *theologia crucis*: scripture, Augustine, mystical theology, and late medieval scholasticism. Despite common themes, the way that Luther develops them is unique.

Chapter Two examines Luther's theology of the cross. As a Christology, the themes of the hidden and revealed God, his understanding of faith, and his understanding of atonement are studied. As a theological method, the incarnation and cross as a starting point, the need to deal honestly with reality, and the application of the theology of the cross to church and society are discussed. Chapter Three studies the peasants' war from the perspective of the *theologia crucis*.

Chapters Four to Seven analyze four contemporary theologies from the perspective of Luther's *theologia crucis*. Chapter Four examines the Political Theology of Remi De Roo, a Canadian Catholic Bishop, and former chairperson of the Social Affairs Commission of the Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops. Chapter Five studies the Hinterland Theology of Benjamin Smillie, former Professor at St. Andrew's College in Saskatoon. Chapter Six focuses on the Contextual Theology of Douglas John Hall, Professor at McGill University, Montreal, and Chapter Seven deals with the Black Theology of James Cone, Professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Of these four theologians, only Hall explicitly discusses Luther's theology of the cross. Yet, as this thesis demonstrates, all have some similarities with the *theologia crucis*, especially in terms of its method. Cone's Black Theology has the most in common with Luther's theology of the cross. The thesis concludes that Luther's theology of the cross can make a significant contribution to

contemporary theologies, especially in terms of its Christological content. Nevertheless, the contemporary theologies studied also have features that would benefit contemporary theologies of the cross.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to many people whose assistance and encouragement has made possible the completion of this dissertation. It has been a time of learning, not only for myself, but for my family as well. Together we have begun to learn, and are discovering, what it means to be *viatores*, pilgrims on the journey. There are times when Brenda and I, as well as our sons Jonathan and Graham, wished that we could "settle down and have some security." The theology of the cross, we are discovering, cannot be merely an academic topic: it calls us all to participate in the present and entrust ourselves to God, whatever may come. Perhaps that is the most valuable learning that has taken place. The lessons to be learned are ongoing. As we conclude one part of the journey, however, it is good to take a break and give thanks for those who have travelled with us so far. Thus, I would like to thank my parents and in-laws for the support and encouragement that they have always given me. Dan, Grant, Alan, Mona and their spouses and families have also, in their own way, reminded us of the realities of life, as only they can!

Thanks are also extended to my *Doktorvater*, Professor Harry McSorley, for the insightful suggestions and careful attention he has given to me. His assistance in helping me place Luther within the theological *Sitz-im-Leben* of his time was greatly appreciated. His kind generosity and consistent support also allowed me to carry on with the minimum of worry. He is truly a doctor of grace. Professor Harold Wells, who directed my comprehensive exam essay, and who was one of the dissertation readers, also deserves a word of thanks. The experience and helpfulness of these, and other professors at the Toronto School of Theology is something I will always be grateful for. They continued the tradition of enthusiastic teaching which I had grown to appreciate at Camrose Lutheran College (now Augustana University College), and Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon.

Furthermore, I would like to thank my classmates and friends from LTS and TST for their support and helpfulness. Their patience in teaching me about computers, their insights at Luther Hour and other events, and their willingness to give a hand, are things that will be treasured long after this dissertation is covered in dust. The people of St. Ansgar Lutheran Church, who welcomed us and became a part of our extended family have also contributed considerably in making our years in Toronto very memorable. They have reminded us that we journey as pilgrims together.

To all of these people; Brenda, Jonathan and Graham, my family, the professors, and many friends, I say thanks. Thank you for walking with me on this pilgrim journey.

GAJ

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED FOR EDITIONS OF LUTHER'S WRITINGS

- Lenker Sermons of Martin Luther. 8 Volumes. Sermons on Gospel and Epistle Texts. John Nicholas Lenker, trans. and ed. Reprint Edition. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1988.
- LW Luther's Works, American Edition. 55 Volumes. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, general eds. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955-1986.
- St.L D. Martin Luthers sämtliche Schriften. 23 Volumes. Johann Georg Walch, ed. Second Edition. (St. Louis: 1880-1910).
- WA D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe. 63 volumes. Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus, 1883-.
- WABr D. Martin Luthers Werke: Briefwechsel. 18 Volumes. Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus, 1930-.
- WATr D. Martin Luthers Werke: Tischreden. 6 Volumes. Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus, 1912-1921.

INTRODUCTION

I. GENERAL OVERVIEW

"The world should not be the way it is."¹ These words reflect a feeling or foreboding that has led to some of the most creative theological developments in history. When a person looks around and sees poverty, racism, sexism, and all other kinds of injustice in society, the conclusion that something is wrong, that this world is not the way it should be, becomes an obvious conclusion. The reality of sin, as defined in the Christian tradition, is also a reflection of, or an explanation of, why things are not as they should be. The fact that something is wrong, however, also gives rise to one justification for the theological endeavour. As Douglas John Hall notes, "Christian theology is, of course, accustomed to the notion that something is wrong. There would be little reason for doing theology if everything were all right."²

The world should not be the way it is. That was perhaps the conclusion a medieval monk in Germany reached upon hearing the popular ditty:

*Wenn das Geld im Kasten klingt
die Seele in den Himmel springt.*³

¹ Juan Luis Segundo, as quoted by Robert McAfee Brown, Making Peace in the Global Village (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981), 12.

² Douglas John Hall, Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship, Commission on Stewardship, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans; New York: Friendship Press, 1986), 1.

³ Martin Brecht notes that Luther was not alone in reacting to this popular ditty. He states that the University of Paris had complained about it as early as 1482, a year before Luther's birth! Brecht, Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, James L. Schaaf, trans. (Philadelphia: (continued...))

Something is wrong, he concluded, when money is taken from the poor people to pay for fancy buildings in Rome and to support the political dealings of those who had ecclesiastical power, such as Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz.¹ Something was wrong when a system, "with all its academic excellence and religious seriousness, had boiled down to heaven-for-money at the level of the common life."² Something was wrong, he concluded, with the theology that he had learned from students of Gabriel Biel and others, since their understanding of justification seemed different from that which he had encountered in his own study of scripture. The Grace of God seemed to be overshadowed by human response. Something is wrong, this monk concluded, when certain scholastic theologians ignored the self-revelation of God as found in the Incarnation in favour of a speculating on what God is like in the heavens. In response to these, as well as other, indications that there was something wrong in the theology that he had encountered, he noted his concerns in treatises that sparked a furore in the church that he could not have imagined.

The world is not the way it should be. That was the conclusion of a medieval monk nearly 500 years ago, and so he sought to address it with what he called the *theologia crucis*.

³(...continued)

Fortress Press, 1985), 182. Heiko A. Oberman notes that the theological faculty in Paris also repudiated the slogan in 1518, calling it "false, scandalous, and untenable." Oberman, Luther: Man Between God and the Devil, Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart, trans. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 190. Luther discusses this slogan in theses 27-8 of the 1518 treatise "Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses." LW 31: 175-77; WA 1: 584.21-586.5.

¹ For a brief description of this, see almost all Luther biographies, such as those by Brecht, Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation, 180ff. Cf. Gerhard Brendler, Martin Luther: Theology & Revolution, Claude R. Foster, Jr., trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 99f. At this time in his life, Luther was not against indulgences themselves; what he attacked was the misuse and abuse of indulgences.

² Hall, Lighten our Darkness: Towards an Indigenous Theology of the Cross (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 122.

That something is wrong is also the conclusion of many people in contemporary society, including theologians. Many of these theologians seek to identify exactly what is wrong, both with society, and the theology that has been used to support such a society. When surrounded by economic, social, political, racial and sexual injustices, it is easy to conclude that something is wrong. Something is wrong when people have to beg for food on Bay Street or Wall Street, the symbols of affluence. The existence of--and increasing demand for!--shelters for abused women and children and food banks in countless cities across Canada and the United States reveals that things are not right. Something is wrong with a society where a man shoots fourteen women in the engineering department at L'École Polytechnique in Montreal because he blamed women for the misfortunes in his life. Something is wrong when visible minorities in Los Angeles and Vancouver are beaten by people entrusted with keeping the peace, and when these officials are not even punished for their excessive use of force. Growing bank profits in the face of ever increasing personal and corporate declarations of bankruptcy and the increasing levels of unemployment point out that something is wrong. A minority of people, when confronted with these discrepancies, are still looking to the churches and to theologians for help; either to shelter them from this "cruel world," or to provide explanations. Those seeking explanations raise important questions: Where is the church in the midst of all these troubles? Where is God? Has the church become "irrelevant" to the needs and cries of the people? If so, has it not lost its "marketability" as a church, as the sociologist Reginald Bibby argues?¹ Has the church lost its ability to attract people into its fold? On the other hand, those who seek shelter in the church pose different issues that need to be dealt with. What can be said to a people who are already

¹ Reginald W. Bibby, Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada (Toronto: Stoddart, 1979), 259.

comfortable in their church pews?¹ Has the *news* aspect of the *good news* (gospel) no longer become neither good nor news to the world in which the church exists? Can any theology be acceptable which does not address the reality of the human context?

Contemporary theologians are faced with questions such as these. In the North American context, they have to wrestle with traditional images of God portrayed in Scriptures and in Christendom in much the same way as Jacob wrestled with the Divine at Peniel (Gen 32:22-32), so that a blessing--the good news!--might be received. Twentieth century theologians have begun to take into account the fact sin is a reflection on, or commentary about, things not being right as they are. Furthermore, it has become obvious that sin is not something that applies only to the individual, but to society as a whole. Theology must address society, not just individuals.

It is the recognition that the world is not the way it should be that has provided for some of the most creative theology in our history. This recognition is something that the medieval monk, Martin Luther, has in common with the contemporary theologians to be discussed in this dissertation. While the contexts and their theological programs developed to address their respective contexts are in many ways very diverse, they are also addressing a similar problem: they have perceived that something is wrong with the way things are. The status quo is not acceptable. It led Luther, and it leads contemporary "contextual" or "political" theologians to analyze and challenge a theology which has either blatantly or "unknowingly" supported the status quo, or which has tried to remain silent and withdrawn from society, as if such an approach would absolve them of all responsibility.

¹ The reference here is to Pierre Berton, *The Comfortable Pew: A Critical Look at the Church in the New Age* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965).

It is clear from the foregoing that this study is convinced that Luther's theology of the cross does have something to offer to contemporary theologies. In the first place, it offers a check against any contemporary theology which becomes so focused on the need to become relevant that the Christian tradition is ignored. Second, the theology of the cross is a subtle reminder to contemporary theologians that Christian theology throughout history is not as homogeneous as is so often thought. Luther's theology of the cross is a minority voice, or as Hall calls it, a "thin tradition,"¹ within the larger Christian tradition. As a minority voice, it can offer guidance to the contemporary theologians who are also proclaimers of a minority tradition. Because it challenged the apparently timeless nature of much of the theology of its time, the theology of the cross provides a basis for contextual theology today. The basic assertion of this work, therefore, is that the theology of the cross can make a significant contribution to contemporary theology.

II. PURPOSE

The goal of this dissertation is to examine the theological content and methodology of Luther's response to the recognition that things are not as they should be, and as delineated in his theology of the cross, with the theological and methodological responses of four different contemporary theologians who feel much the same way. By analyzing these contemporary theologies from the perspective of Luther's theology of the cross, this study will seek to discover what significance Luther's theology of the cross has for these contemporary theologies.

¹ Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 115ff.

The need for this study becomes clear when one realizes the shortage of works that deal expressly with Luther's theology of the cross, and even more specifically, with its relationship to contemporary North American theologies. For example, while there is no shortage of articles and books written about Luther, very few works focus primarily or exclusively on his theology of the cross. Walther von Loewenich and Alister McGrath have written the only substantial monographs on Luther's theology of the cross, while Regin Prenter has published a booklet on the topic.¹ This shortage of works is surprising, since, as von Loewenich convincingly argues, "the theology of the cross is a principle of Luther's entire theology, and it may not be confined to a special period in his theological development."²

Moreover, while there are very few works on the theology of the cross, especially in proportion to the number of works done on Luther's theology, even less has been written about the relationship, or possible relationship, between Luther's theology of the cross and North American contemporary theology. Other than the works by Douglas Hall,³ and a few articles by Robert Kelly,⁴ which have made only tentative suggestions about what significance Luther's

¹ Walther von Loewenich, Luther's Theology of the Cross, Herbert J. A. Bouman, trans. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976); Alister McGrath, Luther's Theology of the Cross (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), and Regin Prenter, Luther's Theology of the Cross, Facet Books Historical Series - 17. Charles S. Anderson, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972).

² von Loewenich, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 12-13.

³ Hall deals with this theme primarily in his works, Lighten our Darkness, God and Human Suffering: An Exercise in the Theology of the Cross (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), and Hope Against Hope: Towards and Indigenous Theology of the Cross (Geneva: World Student Christian Federation, 1971). It is also present, however, in his latest work, Thinking the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989).

⁴ Robert A. Kelly, "The Suffering Church: A Study of Luther's *Theologia Crucis*," Concordial Theological Quarterly 50 no. 1 (January 1986) 3-17; "The Theology of the Cross and Social Ministry," Currents in Theology and Mission 10 no. 2 (April 1983), 95-99; and "The Necessity of the Theology of the Cross Today," Consensus 11 no. 4 (October 1985), 15-22.

theology of the cross might have for contemporary society, little has been done in the area under consideration in this dissertation. Furthermore, the groundwork laid in this work will hopefully also provide a basis for the study of the significance of Luther's theology of the cross for contemporary theologies other than those discussed in this work.

III. CRITERIA AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

1. Criteria Used

In choosing the contemporary theologies that are to be studied, certain specific criteria were used. First, only contemporary theologies which have been developed within the North American context were considered. Second, each of the contemporary theologies selected provide a different or unique theological approach to the issues which confront this society. It is not the intention of this dissertation, therefore, to analyze four similar political theologies, and then to decide which one is closest to Luther's theology of the cross. Third, a conscious decision was made to include only theologies which either arise from or are reflective of a distinct minority voice or perspective within North American society. Fourth, in order for the corpus of material to be of a manageable size, this study is limited to an examination of contemporary theologies that were outlined by theologians who had not published so much material that it was uncontrollable. On the other hand, there had to be sufficient material to provide the basis for an analysis that was not superficial. Of the four theologians chosen, Hall and Cone have written the most. Yet De Roo and Smillie have written enough to provide one with sufficient material to carry out a reasonable assessment of their theology. Fifth, the contemporary theologies included

must be ones that are represented by a specific theologian. This allows for a comparison between two theologians, which provides some consistency in the approach used. Furthermore, it would be an unmanageable task, for example, to try to compare Luther's theology of the cross with all political theologies in North America. By limiting it to a specific individual, the amount of material to be analyzed is also more realistic. Finally, each of the contemporary theologies to be studied are explicitly Christian theologies which contain readily identifiable points of similarity with certain aspects of Luther's theology of the cross.

One of the criteria deliberately not established in the selection of contemporary theologies was that they make an explicit use of the theology of the cross. Such a criterion would have been too much to expect. In fact, only one of the four contemporary theologians, namely Douglas John Hall, deals explicitly with Luther's theology of the cross in his own theological proposals. Nevertheless, it could be argued that some of these contemporary theologies contain an "implicit" theology of the cross--at least in the methodological approaches taken by the contemporary theologians.

A wide variety of representatives were also sought, although it was not a determining factor in the selection of contemporary theologians. Of the four theologians studied, only one is Roman Catholic (De Roo). None of the contemporary Protestant theologians included in this study come from the Lutheran tradition. One is a member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (Cone), while two are members of the United Church of Canada (Smillie and Hall). Three of the contemporary theologians are Canadians, which is significant in the sense that their theology reflects this additional factor of being a minority voice from a sparsely populated country that happens to be a neighbour to a "superpower," namely the U.S.A. The only non-Canadian represented here, however, is still a minority voice within U.S. society. In that sense,

they all have something in common. They are minority voices within Christian churches that are becoming more of a minority voice in society; and they are proclaiming a "minority," or as Hall calls it,¹ "thin" tradition that, as Moltmann notes, has never been "much loved."²

2. Limitations

The criteria used to select the contemporary theologians for this study were used to make the task manageable. Unfortunately, as a result of these criteria, some of the most significant contemporary theologies are not represented. One of these is feminist theology. Because of the vast amount of literature on feminist theology that cover a wide spectrum of theological positions, and because of the great number of feminist theologians who are contributing to theological scholarship, the intimidating task of looking at similarities between feminist theology and a theology of the cross was beyond the manageable scope of this study.

This does not suggest, however, that such a study in the future is not feasible or possible. Many of the themes in feminist theology echo the main themes found in Luther's theology of the cross. The understanding of Jesus as a marginalized person who is able to relate to women and go beyond gender limitations is reflected, for example, by Rosemary Radford Ruether, who stresses Jesus' solidarity with the marginalized of society, and who actually becomes marginalized himself.³ This theme in feminist theology finds a parallel in the theology of the cross. The

¹ Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 115ff.

² As Jürgen Moltmann describes the theology of the cross. The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology, R. A. Wilson and John Bowden, trans. (London: SCM Press; New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 1.

³ "[Jesus] speaks especially to outcast women, not as representatives of the 'feminine', but because they are at the bottom of this network of oppression. His ability to be liberator does not
(continued...)

image of those who are "crucified" by society today, therefore of necessity involves relating the cross of women to the cross of Christ.

Along with the various reflections and discussions that have arisen over sculptures such as *Christine on the Cross*, which can be found at Union Theological Seminary, and the *Christa* sculpture which appeared in 1984 at the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, the recent work by Doris Jean Dyke about the sculpture of the *Crucified Woman*, which stands outside of Emmanuel College in Toronto,¹ provides a possible starting point from which to explore similarities between a theology of the cross and feminist theology. For example, in documenting some of the initial reactions to this sculpture, Dyke included these two poignant observations:

[This sculpture is a] moving and appropriate statement on the suffering of humankind. We are long used to Black Christs as part of the universalizing of the gospel. *Crucified Woman* is entirely within the same tradition. . . .

. . . The next thing you know, someone will give us a crucified Jew. Where will it ever end? [The *Crucified Woman* sculpture] is an effective and needed statement of suffering womankind.²

³(...continued)

reside in his maleness, but, on the contrary, in the fact that he has renounced this system of domination and seeks to embody in his person the new humanity of service and mutual empowerment." Rosemary Radford Ruether, *To Change the World: Christology and Cultural Criticism* (London: SCM Press, 1981), 56.

¹ Dyke's reflections on these statues, as well as crucified women imagery found in literature, can be found in her work, *Crucified Woman* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1991), 36-46.

² Dyke, *Crucified Woman*, 8. Elsewhere, Dyke records the comments of an Emmanuel College student who wrote that this statue of the *Crucified Woman* ". . . points me to Jesus, the Crucified One, the Lamb who was slain and now lives and reigns with God forever. But at the same time, she points me to all victims of violence who share in Jesus's communion of blood shed for our sins. She also of necessity points me to me. It is only the image and the heinous reality of the violent death of Jesus that has given me the tools I need to deal with the heinous
(continued...)

It is statements such as these that suggest similarity to Luther's statements in the Heidelberg Disputation that central to the theology of the cross is the understanding that "God can be found only in suffering and the cross."¹ Moreover, what could be a better contemporary image of the hidden and revealed God that Luther talks about than the image of a crucified *woman*, especially in a theology traditionally dominated by male theologians?

While some of these themes connected with being a suffering people are similar to issues raised by Black Theology (and which are addressed in Chapter Seven), there are significant differences which would warrant a separate study of feminist theology and the theology of the cross. Furthermore, when one reflects on the economic situations of women, especially single mothers, the work of De Roo also becomes more significant. Nevertheless, it is recognized that much work needs to be done. It is hoped that a feminist theologian with an interest in the theology of the cross would embark on a work such as suggested here.

The conscious decision to limit this study to the confines of the North American context also means that the important contemporary theologies of the cross developed in Europe by people such as Pierre Böhler, Eberhard Jüngel, and Jürgen Moltmann, will not be discussed except in passing.² It also means that various versions of the theology of the cross that have

²(...continued)

reality of violence in my own life. . . . You see, I can identify with Jesus as Victim and Jesus as Victim can and has identified with me. I have been touched and healed by bloodied and broken hands." Ibid., 64.

¹ LW 31: 53; WA 1: 362.28-9 (Heidelberg Disputation, 1518).

² Böhler, Kreuz und Eschatologie: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit der politischen Theologie, im Anschluß an Luthers theologia crucis (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1981); Eberhard Jüngel, God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism, Darrell L. Guder, trans. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1983); Moltmann, The Crucified God, and Idem, "The
(continued...)

been developed by Latin American and Asian theologians are unfortunately also excluded.¹ Nevertheless, the contributions of these theologies and theologians must be continually kept in mind so that anyone attempting to develop a contemporary theology of the cross does not ignore the global context in the process of addressing a specific regional or national context.

While certain limitations were required in terms of which contemporary theologies could be studied, to prevent the task from becoming unmanageable, there are also other limitations in this study that need to be recognized. First, this study seeks to approach the topic primarily from a theological, rather than historical, context. In the section on Luther, therefore, the focus is on his theology rather than the actual historical development of his theology of the cross. For example, his theological approach to the peasants' war will be the focus of attention, rather than the actual historical events of the war and the actual legitimacy of the peasants' demands outlined

²(...continued)

Theology of the Cross Today," The Future of Creation, Margaret Kohl, trans. (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 59-79. Hall suggests that Barth, Brunner, Bonhoeffer and Soelle are other Europeans with a "contemporary statement of the theology of the cross." Hall, Thinking the Faith, 30.

¹ For example, some of the classic Latin American liberation theologians which echo a theology of the cross in some respects are: Jon Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach, John Drury, trans. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1978); Idem, Jesus in Latin America (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987); Ignacio Ellacuria, Freedom Made Flesh: The Mission of Christ and His Church, John Drury, trans. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1976); and Leonardo Boff, Passion of Christ, Passion of the World: Their Facts, Their Interpretation, and Their Meaning, Yesterday and Today, Robert R. Barr, trans. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987).

Some of the Asian liberation theologies which have some similarities with a theology of the cross are: C. S. Song, Jesus, the Crucified People, Volume 1, The Cross in the Lotus World (New York: Crossroad, 1990); and Shusaku Endo's novel, Silence, William Johnston, trans. (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1969). A more explicit theology of the cross is found in Kazoh Kitamori, Theology of the Pain of God (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1965).

Hall suggests that many of these, and other works of liberation theologians, contain "strong intimations of the *theologia crucis* tradition." Hall, Thinking the Faith, 32, n. 24.

in the *Twelve Articles*.¹ While it is impossible to separate the theological interpretations of events from the actual historical events themselves, the primary focus in this study will be the theological significance of these events. This in no way implies that the historical context will be ignored. Rather, care has been taken to locate Luther's theology, and his theological development, within the historical context. This is also the case with the contemporary theologies studied. While it is important to know the historical events which have shaped, and perhaps even given birth to, the contemporary theologies, this study will restrict itself primarily to a study of the theological themes rather than the historical events themselves. What is of immediate interest here, therefore, is the theology that has arisen from these events. On the other hand, to ignore the historical context would be to deny the theologians' attempts to make Christian theology, as they understand it, incarnate in their historical situation. Proclamation must take place within a historical context, and it must deal with that historical context if it wants to be able to relate the gospel to people.

Second, the approach taken in this study will also be primarily analytical rather than prescriptive. It is not intended that within these pages a contemporary North American theology of the cross will be developed that is somehow capable of solving all the theological and social issues that it confronts. This work does not seek, therefore, to offer solutions that would help the church, theologians, and perhaps even society, to enter into the darkness and its lack of security which is part of the reality of life. That would be contrary to the nature of the theology of the cross. Rather, this work will attempt to analyze contemporary theologies from the perspective of the theology of the cross in order to discover what significance it might have to offer contemporary theologians. It is not a one-way street, however: in the process of

¹ These *Twelve Articles*, which list peasant grievances, can be found in LW 46: 8-16.

discovering ways in which the theology of the cross can make a significant contribution to contemporary theologies, weaknesses in Luther's theology of the cross will also be unveiled. The study, therefore, is mutually beneficial.

IV. STRUCTURAL OUTLINE OF THIS STUDY

This dissertation has two distinct parts: Part One will focus on the theology of the cross as outlined by Luther. This will include an overview of some of the more important antecedents for his theology of the cross in Chapter One, and a description of the theology of the cross in Chapter Two. Chapter Three will be a case study of how Luther did--or did not--apply the theology of the cross to one of the most important historical, social, and political events of his time: the peasants' war.

Part Two will deal with an analysis of four distinct contemporary theologians from the perspective of Luther's theology of the cross. The purpose of this analysis is to determine significant points of agreement between Luther and the contemporary theologies--regardless of whether these points of agreement are explicit or implicit--that have been chosen.

Chapter Four will focus on the political theology of the Roman Catholic Bishop Remi De Roo, who was for many years on the Social Affairs Commission (SAC) of the Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops (CCCB). His political theology includes a strong emphasis on solidarity with the marginalized and victimized of society. As a member of the SAC, he was influential in the development of the 1982 "Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis" statement of the CCCB

that reflected on the state of the Canadian economy.¹ This statement caused a large public reaction because of the boldness of the church to speak out explicitly about economic and social issues from moral and Christian perspectives. At the heart of the "Ethical Reflections" statement, however, was the call for solidarity with those who are marginalized. With his strong emphasis on the Incarnation, De Roo also has much common ground with Luther's theology of the cross, even if it is never delineated. While Gregory Baum, among others, also stresses the theme of solidarity,² and is perhaps better known, the works of De Roo were chosen since his writings are a more manageable corpus of material, and also because De Roo is more of a "minority" voice in academic circles than is Baum.

In Chapter Five, attention will be given to the "hinterland" theology of Benjamin Smillie, who uses a Marxian analysis of Canadian society, as well as an analysis of the social and economic relationship between Canada and the United States. Smillie argues that the "hinterland" regions of Canada (such as the prairies), are subservient to the economic dictates of the "metropol" (as symbolized by Toronto's Bay Street). He goes on, however, to suggest that Canada is also a natural resource hinterland to the United States. In an attempt to address these unhealthy relationships, he calls for a Marxian analysis of society to discover who the rich really are. His theological approach also relies on the richness of the prophetic tradition, which has expressed many of the same concerns that he raises.

¹ This statement can be found in E. F. Sheridan, Do Justice! The Social Teaching of the Canadian Catholic Bishops (Sherbrooke, Quebec: Éditions Paulines; and Toronto: The Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice, 1987), 399-410.

² See here Gregory Baum, Compassion and Solidarity: The Church For Others (Toronto: CBC Enterprises, 1987). Also of note are two works which he has co-authored: Gregory Baum and Robert Ellsberg, eds., The Logic of Solidarity (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989); and Baum and Duncan Cameron, Ethics and Economics: Canada's Catholic Bishops and the Economic Crisis (Toronto: Lorimer, 1984).

The contextual theology espoused by Douglas John Hall will be the focus of Chapter Six. Rather than addressing specific political or economic issues, as De Roo and Smillie have done, Hall turns his attention to exploring the cultural context of a society which has been afraid to face up to the reality of the problems and myths upon which affluent North American society has been built. He relies on sociology, literature and various other disciplines to inform his analysis of the cultural context, and proposes that a theology of the cross would best address the prevalent cultural attitude found in both church and society.

Chapter Seven will focus on the Black Theology of James Cone. His exploration of the significance of the Incarnation in contemporary society, based on a racial analysis, provides a fourth contemporary theology. His call to move away from European-developed theologies, and the development of indigenous North American theologies which take into account the unique and specific context of society in Canada and the United States includes the need for a Black Theology that deals with the oppressive situation of African-Americans. As a form of liberation theology, his work also provides a bridge with Latin American, African and Asian liberation theologies.

The internal structure of Chapters Two through Seven will follow a similar pattern. Based upon the structure of Luther's *theologia crucis*, the case study in Chapter Three and the contemporary theologies of Part Two will be analyzed according to their Christological content and methodology. While in the case of Luther the Christological content of his *theologia crucis* will precede the discussion of his methodology, their order in the contemporary theologians will depend on which aspect is most important to that particular contemporary theology. In other words, the order will reflect whether their Christology informs their methodology, or whether the methodology informs their Christology. While in Luther's case his Christological content

informs his methodology, the ideal theology of the cross would be evenly balanced between the two major aspects of this theology.

The importance of a balance between Christological content and methodology is perhaps best reflected by the dual emphasis that Moltmann places between the crisis of identity and the crisis of relevance; or more accurately, a crisis of identity and involvement.¹ The danger of contemporary theologies which focus on involvement in the world is that what is often sacrificed is the theological—or more specifically, Christological—identity. Christology is forgotten in the clamour to be relevant. On the other hand, the danger which confronts theological approaches that focus only on Christology is that no attempt is made to either interpret or make Christology relevant to the contemporary situation. Such a theology preserves its Christian identity, but is not relevant. Neither extreme does justice to the Christian tradition.

The dissertation will conclude with a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the selected contemporary theologians, based on their comparison with the Christology and methodology found in Luther's theology of the cross. The Conclusion will also include reflections on the balance—or lack of balance—between the theological emphasis and methodological application of each of the theologians studied in this work. Suggestions will also be made about some of the limitations and strengths of Luther's theology of the cross for contemporary theologies. Finally, proposals will be made about possible areas of future research and study, including the relevance of a theology of the cross for ecumenical and interfaith dialogue.

¹ Moltmann, The Crucified God, 7ff.

PART ONE

THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS OF MARTIN LUTHER

CHAPTER ONE

ANTECEDENTS TO LUTHER'S *THEOLOGIA CRUCIS*

I. INTRODUCTION

Although Luther was the first person to use the term *theologia crucis*, his was not the first theology of the cross. Any attempt to interpret the event of the cross of Christ can be interpreted as a theology of the cross. This study, however, will focus on Luther's own unique *theologia crucis*, rather than attempting to describe all theologies of the cross in Christian theology.

While there are doubtless many antecedents for Luther's theology of the cross in the history of the church, this chapter will limit itself to an examination of four specific areas of influences, similarities, or antecedents: scripture; Augustine of Hippo; the mystics; and late medieval scholasticism. Each of these have either left their mark on Luther's theological development, or contain certain similarities with his theology of the cross.

II. SCRIPTURAL ANTECEDENTS

A primary source of Luther's theology of the cross is Holy Scripture. As Hägglund correctly notes, any attempts to explain Luther's theology apart from his preoccupation with

scripture is doomed to fail.¹ As a Professor of Biblical Studies, he immersed himself in Scripture. In the Psalms and the epistles of Paul, Luther "discovered" the themes which comprise the theology of the cross. Three pertinent scriptural antecedents for the theology of the cross will be addressed: significant Pauline passages, the Gospels, and the Hebrew Scriptures.

A. Paul's Theology of the Cross

Central to Paul's thought is the idea that all "theological reflection begins with the message of the crucified Messiah."² What is not clear, however, is where Paul got this idea, whether it is a justified interpretation, and what the cross actually signifies.³ In other words, what actually happens on the cross of Christ? These questions reveal some of the difficulties encountered in any attempt to decisively define Paul's theology of the cross.

¹ Bengt Hägglund, The Background of Luther's Doctrine of Justification in Late Medieval Theology, Facet Books Historical Series - 18. Charles S. Anderson, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 1.

² Charles B. Cousar, A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters, Overtures to Biblical Theology Series (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 27, 179. Cousar is not alone in this interpretation. See, for example, Ernst Käsemann, "The Pauline Theology of the Cross," Interpretation 24 (1970), 167, 172; Walter Kreck, "The Word of the Cross: Doctrinal Theses and Definitions Dealing with the Understanding of the Death of Jesus in Current Theology and Proclamation," Interpretation 24 (1970), 237; Robin S. Barbour, "Wisdom and the Cross in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2," Theologia Crucis-Signum Crucis: Festschrift für Erich Dinkler zum 70. Geburtstag, Carl Andresen and Günter Klein, eds. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1979), 58; Peter Stuhlmacher, "Eighteen Theses on Paul's Theology of the Cross," Reconciliation, Law and Righteousness: Essays in Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 156; and Ulrich Luz, "Theologia Crucis als Mitte der Theologie im Neuen Testament," Evangelische Theologie 34 (1974), 122. The recent article by Thomas Söding, "Kreuzestheologie und Rechtfertigungslehre," Catholica 46 no. 1 (1992), 31-60, provides a needed update on developments in this area of scholarship.

³ For example, Kreck asks whether this decision to make the cross central to his theology is justified. Kreck, "The Word of the Cross," 222. Along with Barbour, we need to ask where Paul got this idea from. Barbour, "Wisdom and the Cross," 57.

1. **1 Corinthians 1:18 - 2:5.** This is the most succinct exposition of the theology of the cross in Paul's writings. Here Paul places great emphasis on the "word of the cross." It is either a "stumbling block," since it rejects all attempts to logically deduce from "signs" any *a priori* understandings of "how God *ought* to behave in a saving event"; or "foolishness," since it rejects all attempts to force a logical system, based on a human interpretation of reality, upon the cross.¹ Human wisdom ("the wisdom of the world," [1:20]) is rejected because it "habitually misconstrues the knowledge of God" which has been revealed in creation (cf. Romans 1:19-25).² Nor is this foolishness of the cross merely the first stage in a transformation, whereby once things are explained properly, it will make sense. It remains foolishness according to human wisdom. It is wisdom only insofar as it is beyond our capabilities. Christ becomes wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption "for us."

Four things arise from this passage. First, as has already been noted, all theological reflection begins with the cross.³ Second, the cross provides a revelation of God: a God who does not "look and act as a respectable God ought to look and act."⁴ As Cousar notes, there is also a hidden aspect to this revelation: "God is to be known precisely in the message of the cross as a shameful and scandalous event."⁵ The theme of reversals is also present:

¹ Cousar, A Theology of the Cross, 28-9.

² *Ibid.*, 29.

³ As Cousar notes, "Pauline epistemology begins with the message of the crucifixion." *Ibid.*, 179. This idea is also reflected by Leander Keck: "God made Christ the framework for our understanding of God." Keck, "Biblical Preaching as Divine Wisdom," A New Look at Preaching, John Burke, ed. (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1983), 153.

⁴ Cousar, A Theology of the Cross, 181. This discontinuity cannot be bridged by "more" or "better" knowledge, however. *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

At the heart of the divine revelation is a revolution of immense proportions, a thorough reversal of who is weak and who is strong. The weak find their strength not in themselves, even renewed by the gospel, but in Christ. . . .¹

These reversals are useful, however, only so long as one remains united to Christ. Even our wisdom, in one sense, therefore, belongs not to us but to Christ; it is never something one possesses in isolation from Christ. Reversals happen only within the context of God's revelation, and then only within an ongoing relationship with the crucified one.

Third, the issue of atonement is raised. The word of the cross contains a soteriology: "to those who are being saved, it is the power of God" (1:18). However, Paul does not spell out how this salvation occurs.² All that is certain is that it is an act of God, it is a result of God's

¹ Cousar, A Theology of the Cross, 35.

² Throughout his writings, Paul consistently suggests various interpretations of how Christ's death on the cross is salvific. As Cousar notes, "The problem is that the Pauline language for atonement is so diverse that it is well nigh impossible for a single theory to account for its variety." Cousar, A Theology of the Cross, 87. Christ's death is sacrificial (Romans 3:25), a substitution for us (Galatians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:21), redemptive (1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23, Galatians 3:13, 4:15), and even liberative (Romans 8:23). Cousar provides a succinct commentary about these themes in Paul's letters. *Ibid.*, 161-3. Stuhlmacher approaches these various themes in a slightly different way, arguing that Paul makes use of the two main traditions to explain what happened on the cross, namely the atonement tradition and the tradition of Christ as the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52-53), that is, Christ acting for us, on our behalf, and Christ as example. Stuhlmacher states, ". . . Jesus himself stood within and pondered these two traditions that were constitutive for Paul's theology of the cross, the atonement tradition and the tradition about the Suffering Righteous One." Stuhlmacher, "Eighteen Theses on Paul's Theology of the Cross," 165.

Luther follows in Paul's footsteps in having many interpretations of Christ's death. Despite Gustaf Aulén's attempts to classify Luther as a proponent of the "Christus Victor" theory of atonement, Luther cannot be limited to this theory. This varied approach prevents one from turning atonement, and even the word of the cross, too quickly into a human system or scheme devised to explain conclusively what happened on the cross. To do so would be to rob God of freedom and sovereignty, the very thing the theology of the cross fights against.

revelation, and it occurs somehow within the action of reversals. As such, it challenges those who are perishing, and offers hope to those who are being saved.¹

Fourth, the word of the cross calls people to become involved in the world. As Pannenberg states, "The cross does not provide the spiritual power to become independent of the world. That is its weakness."²

While this passage from 1 Corinthians has many similarities with Luther's theology of the cross, there are some major differences. Paul and Luther have a different focus and they address different situations. Paul is concerned with unity in the Corinthian congregation, while Luther's main concern was righteousness.³

2. Other Pauline Passages. It is not only 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 which deals with a theology of the cross. Romans 3:21-26 reinforces the notion that "the cross of Christ for Paul has indispensable significance for epistemology,"⁴ while Romans 6:1-11 ties Christ's death and crucifixion into our understanding of baptism and discipleship. Here Paul suggests that the cross of Christ involves Christians. It is not a theology *about* the cross, but a theology *of* the cross, calling for involvement rather than analysis. Furthermore, Paul consistently rejects any theology that takes away the sovereignty of God. As Luz notes, "In Paul's theology of the cross he has

¹ Cousar argues that Käsemann correctly recognizes that the word of the cross is a polemical theology (a challenge to those who are perishing), but overlooks the comforting or nurturing nature of it for those who are being saved. See Cousar, A Theology of the Cross, 33, 36; and Käsemann, "The Pauline Theology of the Cross," 153-4.

² Wolfhart Pannenberg, "A Theology of the Cross," Word & World 8 no. 2 (Spring 1988), 163-4.

³ *Ibid.*, 163-4.

⁴ Cousar, A Theology of the Cross, 42; Käsemann, "The Pauline Theology of the Cross," 154.

to do with the godness of God."¹ Paul's theology of the cross, then, can briefly be summarized as follows. First, the word of the cross prevents one from creating a God in one's own image (based on inferences or speculations about what God is like in the heavens). Rather, the word of the cross is a self-revelation of God, a revelation which cannot be obtained through human methods.²

Second, this revelation of God reveals a God who is both radically free from human limitations, and radically involved in humanity and its predicament.³ God's freedom remains while reality is upheld. Consequently, hope comes, not from an avoidance of the cross, but from the cross itself, where the final triumph of God is anchored.⁴

E. A Theology of the Cross in the Gospels

The Passion narratives attempt to explain both the reason and the significance of Christ's suffering and death.⁵ Yet there is a remarkable diversity here as to what the cross signifies.

¹ "Es geht also Paulus in seiner Kreuzestheologie um die Gottheit Gottes." Luz, "*Theologia crucis* als Mitte der Theologie," 124.

² Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross*, 179-80. While Paul does acknowledge the natural ability of the mind to know God through the creation, and to know that God is good, he feels that this "natural" knowledge is not able to reveal that God forgives sin or that God in Christ became incarnate and died on the cross for us. That is why the cross seems to be such a scandal: it *appears* to contradict what "natural" knowledge reveals.

³ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 188-89.

⁵ The cross does not figure in the earliest gospel sources, such as Q. Only later does the Christian community try, in its liturgical formulations and theological reflection, to make sense of the events on the cross. Willi Marxsen, "Erwägungen zum Problem des verkündigten Kreuzes," *New Testament Studies* 8 (1961-2), 204-14.

When the early Christian community does try to interpret the cross, however, various interpretations arise. For example, as Hans Conzelmann states, "In Matthew . . . the passion (continued...)"

It is understood in terms of fulfilling scripture, of an act by God to redeem an unsuspecting, even hostile humanity, and as a necessary step along the path to victory. While there are hints that the death of Jesus on the cross is a result of the actions he had taken during his lifetime, the overriding focus is on God having ordained Christ's death so that the victory revealed in the resurrection might come to pass.

A more subtle source in the gospels for Luther's theology of the cross is found in the Magnificat of Luke 1:46-55.¹ Especially pertinent is the theme of the great reversals which it contains. This theme is woven into both his understanding of the Incarnation and of revelation, and it provides Luther with a basic methodological principle for the theology of the cross.

C. Witnesses from Hebrew Scripture

While the Hebrew Scriptures do not contain an explicit theology of the cross, they do contain certain themes which factor into Luther's *theologia crucis*. Deuteronomy 21:23 reveals

⁵(...continued)

means on the one hand the provision of salvation (Jesus as *sacramentum*), and on the other hand the model for believers (Jesus as *exemplum*)." Conzelmann, "History and Theology in the Passion Narratives of the Synoptic Gospels," *Interpretation* 24 (1970), 192. John's gospel, however, has a different purpose. Here the passion narrative serves to highlight the victory of Christ, who unhesitatingly follows God's cause to the very end. Absent in John are the themes of Jesus' feeling of abandonment by God, or of the abrupt, fearful ending of Mark. The cross in John is merely a step on the way to the glorious victory of the resurrection and glorification of God. Ernst Haenchen, "History and Interpretation in the Johannine Passion Narrative," *Interpretation* 24 (1970) 198-219. See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Life of Jesus*, Jack C. Verheyden, ed., S. MacLean Gilmour, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) for a clear theological treatise that follows John's approach to the cross.

¹ Luther has an extensive commentary on the Magnificat, which he wrote while hiding in the Wartburg castle during the spring and summer of 1521. LW 21: 295-358; WA 7: 538-604.

the reason the cross is "a stumbling block to the Jews," as Paul puts it (1 Cor. 1:18ff). Whoever hung upon a tree was cursed, abandoned by God.¹

The suffering servant is a second relevant theme. Revealed here is a passionate God, who is intimately involved in human suffering. God hears the cries of the enslaved people in Egypt. Even more importantly, it suggests that somehow the redemption of God's people comes about through suffering—a very human suffering, to be sure—but a suffering that carries divine significance. This suffering servant is both an example to follow and a sacrifice for us; he suffers in our place. A third theme which Luther discovered in the Hebrew Scripture is that of the hidden and revealed God. Psalm 18:11 (which he lectured on very early in his career), and Isaiah 45:15, for example, figure prominently in the development of Luther's thought.²

Finally, a more subtle, but equally important theme from Hebrew Scripture cannot be overlooked: the idea that God's faithfulness to the divine-human relationship cannot be measured by the success or failure of the people of God.³ As William Hordern notes, "the Jews' faith in Yahweh never depended upon triumphs."⁴ God was present in adversity as well as in triumphs.

¹ The person who hung on a tree symbolized the complete opposite of the human who was allowed to enter into the Temple's holy of holies. The former is the symbol of God's abandonment, the latter the ultimate symbol of where God is. As Käsemann so succinctly puts it, "If the cross, which we value as a symbol of religiosity, was erected at a place where God was deemed absent, then the veneration and worship of the one who hung upon it would without question be the most frightful scandal." Käsemann, "The Pauline Theology of the Cross," 156.

² Luther develops this theme in his first Psalm Lectures of 1513-1515 (LW 10: 119-20; WA 3: 124f), and in his 1527-30 Isaiah Lectures (LW 17: 131ff; WA 31/II: 364ff). He also uses this theme in his 1535 Galatians Commentary (LW 26: 113, 228; WA 40: 204, 362), as well as in the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518 (LW 31: 52; WA 1: 362).

³ For example, defeat by the Babylonians did not cause the Jews to give up their God to worship Marduk and Ishtar, who seemed to have defeated Yahweh. This broke the common pattern, whereby the victorious god was the god deserving of worship.

⁴ William E. Hordern, Experience and Faith: The Significance of Luther for Understanding Today's Experiential Religion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 87.

III. THE INFLUENCE OF EARLY CHURCH THEOLOGIANS AND BIBLICAL COMMENTATORS

While Luther studied the scriptures carefully, he did not limit his study to Scripture itself. He read the works of the early church theologians that were available to him. One of the most influential theologians for Luther was Augustine; not only for his comments on grace in the Pelagian controversy, but also because of Augustine's biblical commentaries. Luther also consulted the commentaries written by Gregory, Nicholas of Lyra, Hugo Cardinal and Faber Stapulensis, to name a few.¹ While Stapulensis will be studied along with the mystics, the focus in this section will be on Augustine, and then Nicholas of Lyra.

A. Augustine of Hippo

In his preface to the *Deutsche Theologie*, Luther stated that it, along with the Bible and St. Augustine were his three main teachers.² He joined the Augustinian order as a young man. He began to read Augustine (354-430) while in the order, and by the time he received his doctorate, he had read many of his works. In fact, in his first Psalms commentary, he makes reference to Augustine 270 times.³ Throughout the writings of Luther, Augustine is to be found.

¹ Jaroslav Pelikan, Luther the Expositor: Companion Volume of Luther's Works, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 42.

² LW 31: 75; WA 1: 378 (1518 Preface).

³ Marc Lienhard, Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ. Stages and Themes of the Reformer's Christology. Edwin H. Robinson, trans. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982), 25. Lienhard here relies on the work of Freidrich Held, "Augustins Enarrationes in Psalmos als
(continued...)

Since Augustine has been considered "the doctor of Grace," it is not surprising that Luther borrows heavily from him in his own writings on justification. While Luther is not always in agreement with him on this and other issues, he is definitely in dialogue with him. During the period in which Luther developed his theology of the cross, as he was lecturing on the Psalms, Romans, Hebrews and Galatians, the presence of Augustine is clearly felt. Even though justification and grace are central to these writings, these themes will be mentioned only in relation to the main themes of the theology of the cross, which is the focus of attention in this study.

One of the themes found both in Augustine and Luther is the emphasis on Christology. While McWilliam argues convincingly that Augustine remained theocentric throughout his life, he does place great significance on the role of Christ.¹ For Augustine, Christ is the way to the Trinity.² His commentary on the Psalms, which was used extensively by Luther, also reveals a tendency to interpret the Psalms Christologically.³ He also takes the Incarnation seriously. In his Psalms commentary, Augustine states that Christ took upon himself earth from earth, because flesh is from the earth and he

³(...continued)

exegetische Vorlage für Luthers erste Psalmenvorlesung." Doctoral Dissertation. (Kiel: Christian Albrechts Universität, 1929), 17. However, it is important to note that at this stage (1512-1514), Luther was not aware of all of Augustine's major writings. It appears that he did not come into contact with Augustine's Anti-Pelagian writings, for example, until near the end of his lectures on the Psalms. His lectures on Romans (1515-1516) indicate, however, familiarity with these writings.

¹ Joanne McWilliam Dewart, "Augustine's Developing Use of the Cross: 387-400." *Augustinian Studies* 15 (1984), 16. For a description of the importance of Christ to Augustine, see the classic work of Eugène Portalié, *A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine*, Ralph J. Bastian, ed. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1960), 152-3.

² Dewart, "Augustine's Developing Use of the Cross," 16.

³ Held, "Augustins Enarrationes," 17. See also Lienhard, *Luther*, 25.

received flesh from the flesh of Mary. . . . He walked here in that very flesh and gave us that very flesh to eat for our salvation.¹

While Augustine makes reference here to the sacrament of the altar, it is nevertheless clear that he wants to emphasize the humanity of Christ, and that he feels that many of the Psalms refer to Christ--either *in persona sua*, as Luther often does, or *in persona ecclesiae*.²

Another Christological theme found in Augustine and Luther is that of the humiliation of Christ in the Incarnation. As Adolf Hamel notes, "The humiliated Christ has frequently been referred to in the *Enarrationes*. It is an essential part of Augustinian christology and soteriology."³ Augustine also noted that the divinity of Christ is hidden in this humility.⁴ Thus, the humiliated Christ is also a self-revelation of God. As Lienhard states,

¹ Augustine, "*Enarrationes in Psalmos*," *Corpus christianorum. Series latina*. (Turnhout, Belgium: Typographi Brepols, 1953 -), Volume 39, p. 1385. See also Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. 5 Volumes. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971-1989), 305.

² Yet there is a difference here between Augustine and Luther. For example, while Augustine does interpret many of the Psalms Christologically, when it comes to the passion Psalms (such as the cry of abandonment in Psalm 22, Augustine does not think it is appropriate to apply them to Christ *in persona sua*. Rather, he tones them down and applies them to Christ *in persona ecclesiae*. An excellent work to consult in this regard is G. Jouassard, "L'Abandon du Christ d'après Saint Augustin," *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 13 (1924), 310-26. Luther, however, does not hesitate to apply this Psalm to the person of Christ. See here Lienhard, *Luther*, 25; Erich Vogelsang, *die Anfänge von Luthers Christologie* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1929), 18-19.

Lienhard also follows Vogelsang in suggesting that while Luther accepts and appreciates the emphasis on the Incarnation by Augustine and other theologians of the early church, he adds to it the theology of the cross. Lienhard, *Luther*, 40-41; Vogelsang, *Luthers Christologie*, 91-95.

³ Adolph Hamel, *Der junge Luther und Augustin* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1934), 197.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 200.

Luther, like Augustine, does not see the humiliated Christ only from the point of view of a spirituality of the imitation of Christ, but also in the perspective of a theology of revelation, the revelation of God hidden in weakness.¹

In the early stages of his Christological development, Augustine saw two possible means of God's self-revelation: on the one hand there were those who were able to contemplate the divine truth as symbolized by the "clear eyed Rachel"; on the other hand, there were those who required the preaching of Christ crucified, as symbolized by "weak-eyed" Leah, and which included the majority of people.²

The distinction between the alien and proper work of Christ, which was central to Luther, is also to be found in Augustine. In his work, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, Augustine uses this theme, in various forms, repeatedly. God acts in a puzzling way, in order to bring about his proper goal. Luther picks up on this, and in his Romans commentary of 1515-1516, he reflects this influence of Augustine.³ It also is used by Luther as one of the principle themes of the theology of the cross. Through the strange work of God in Christ on the cross, the proper work of God is revealed.

¹ Lienhard, *Luther*, 26. See also Hamel, *junge Luther*, 197-200. Portalié states, "Augustine thinks of [Christ] whenever he speaks of revelation and authority..." Portalié. *Augustine*, 152.

² Dewart, "Augustine's Developing Use of the Cross," 31. See also her article, Joanne McWilliam, "Augustine and Christology," in *The Christological Foundation for Contemporary Theological Education*, Joseph Ban, ed. (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1988), 84f. This imagery of Leah and Rachel comes from Augustine's work, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, III.6; V.4.

³ For example, see Luther's marginal gloss on Romans 5:21, where it is argued that God gives the law to increase sin and make us more worthy of death, rather than justifying us. It is precisely by this strange or alien work of God--of increasing human sin--that God acts to bring about his proper work: that of salvation. LW 25: 49; WA 56: 55-56. Here Luther refers to *De Spiritu et littera* of Augustine, especially chapter 6.

The influence of Augustine on Luther's understanding of atonement is also apparent. Augustine was careful to link salvation to the saviour: the work of Christ cannot be separated from the person of Christ.¹ The same is to be said for Luther. Furthermore, Luther picks up on the distinction Augustine made between Christ as sacrament and Christ as example.² Augustine developed this theme in Book IV of his work, *On the Trinity*, which he wrote during the beginning of the fifth century.³ In Luther's marginal comments on Book IV, which date to 1509-1510, he has already begun to explore and develop the theological significance of this theme.⁴ It must be remembered, however, that Augustine originally stressed the notion of Christ as *exemplum* much more than Christ as *sacramentum*.⁵ It was only in reaction to the

¹ Portalié, for example, states, "[Augustine's] soteriology depends on his soterology." Augustine, 160.

² As Pelikan notes, "For, as Luther had learned from Augustine, 'Scripture presents Christ in two ways: first, as a gift. . .; secondly, as an example for us to imitate.' To 'Christ the Victor' and 'Christ the fulfiller' must be added 'Christ the example.' Like Anselm and Bernard before him, Luther emphasized Christ as gift far more than Christ as example." Pelikan, Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700), *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, 164. See also Luther's comments on Gal. 2:20 in his 1519 Galatians commentary (LW 27: 238f; WA 2: 501-02), his comments on Gal. 5:8 in his 1535 Galatians commentary (LW 27:34; WA 40/II: 43), and his comments on 1 Peter 4:1 in his 1522 Commentary (LW 30: 117; WA 12: 371). See also Lienhard, Luther, 25-6, and Erwin Iserloh, "Luther's Christ-Mysticism," Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther, Jared Wicks, ed. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1970), 51-54.

³ The standard English translation of *De Trinitate* is The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Volume 3. Philip Schaff, ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988 reprint).

Two fine articles to consult concerning Augustine's Christology and soteriology are: Émile Bailleux, "La Christologie de saint Augustin dans le *De Trinitate*," Recherches Augustiniennes 7 (1971), 219-243; and Idem, "La Soteriologie de saint Augustin dans le *De Trinitate*," Melanges des Sciences Religieuses 23 (1966), 149-173.

⁴ Luther's marginal notes on this work of Augustine are found in WA 9: 18,29ff. See also Iserloh, "Luther's Christ-Mysticism," 51-52, and especially note 90, p. 179.

⁵ A good example of this is found in *De Trinitate* VIII, 3, 5.

Manicheans, and as a result of becoming a bishop, responsible for the teaching of the faith, that Augustine slowly moved toward stressing the sacrificial aspect of Christ's death as well as his death as an example for Christians to follow.¹ Augustine's view changes to the extent that he later writes, "The carnal man...does not perceive...what grace the cross of Christ bestows upon those who believe; he thinks that on the cross He acted in this way only that He might leave us...an example to be imitated."²

The concept of the "joyous exchange" is another theme found in Athanasius, Augustine and Luther. For Augustine, one of the clearest expositions of this idea comes in his *Confessions*, where he writes concerning his mother:

She knew that [from your altar] is dispensed the holy Victim by whom that which was written against us was wiped out; by whom the enemy, counting our sins, was defeated because he sought [some sin in Christ] and found nothing in him in whom we conquer.³

In the next book of the *Confessions*, Augustine expands on this view by talking about Christ as both the Victim and the Victor.⁴ Christ exchanges his righteousness for our sin, so that he becomes the Victim on our behalf, thereby giving us victory over the enemy. This idea also

¹ Dewart, "Augustine's Developing Use of the Cross," 26-32.

² *In Johannis Evangelium tractatus*, 93,3. written circa 416-417. Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina, J. P. Migne, ed. (Paris: 1841-1877), vol. 35, pp. 1881-2. See also Portalié, Augustine, 164.

³ "unde [de altare] sciret dispensari victimam sanctam, qua deletum est chirographum, quod erat contrarium nobis, qua triumphatus est hostis computans delicta nostra, et quarens, quod obiciat, et nihil inveniens in illo, in quo vincimus." *Confessiones*, Book IX.13.35-6. Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum, (Vienna: Geraldini filium, 1866-1939), vol. 33, p. 225. See also Pelikan, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600), 258.

⁴ *Confessiones*, X.43.68. Christ is "to you both Victor and Victim on our behalf, and it was because he was Victim that he is also Victor." (pro nobis tibi victor et victima, et ideo victor, quia victima).

provides Luther with another image for the alien and proper work of Christ: Christ's alien work, becoming a victim, leads to his proper work, that of gaining victory over the evil one.

There are also similarities between Augustine and Luther regarding theological methodology. The use of reversals as a method for doing theology, for example, is found in both theologians. In his 1515-1516 Romans commentary, Luther quotes in a marginal gloss from Augustine's *De Spiritu et littera*,¹ in which Augustine suggests that Paul receives mercy instead of condemnation, grace instead of punishment. The law renders the proud guilty, while wisdom's kindness justifies the humble.² God's alien works bring about reversals, re-establishing God's proper order in human life.

It is also within the range of possibility that Luther was influenced by Augustine with regard to describing the reality of human life. Both note the sinful nature of human beings. Both Luther and Augustine are sceptical of human attempts of self-justification, suggesting that self-justification is a

servile righteousness; it is mercenary, feigned, specious, external, temporal, worldly, human. It profits nothing for the glory to come but receives in this life its reward, glory, riches, honor, power, friendship, well-being, or at least peace and quiet, and fewer evils than those who act otherwise. This is how Christ describes the Pharisees and how St. Augustine describes the Romans in the eighth chapter of the first book of *The City of God*.³

Pelikan suggests that Luther's doctrine of *simul iustus et peccator* also has antecedents in the writings of Augustine. He suggests that in the 1519 Galatians commentary, Luther

¹ LW 25: 50; WA 56: 56-7. Luther quotes here from *De Spiritu et littera*, 7, 12.

² Luther quotes from *De spiritu et littera*, 9, 19, in his 1519 Galatians commentary (LW 27: 274; WA 2: 526), while discussing the theme of reversals in Galatians 3:22.

³ LW 27: 219; WA 2: 489 (1519 Galatians Commentary).

took Augustine's *Nature and Grace* as testimony to his own basic view that in the usage of Scripture "the 'righteous' are not wholly perfect in themselves, but God accounts them righteous because of their faith in his Son Jesus Christ."¹

While this is still far from the understanding that Luther reaches concerning *simul iustus et peccator*, Augustine's writings appear to point in that direction. It is clear, however, that this was not a doctrine created *ex nihilo* by Luther.

This recognition of the human not being wholly perfect in themselves is also applied by Augustine to the church. Until death is conquered and history comes to an end, suggests Augustine, "the time will not come for the church as a whole when it will be utterly without spot or wrinkle or any such thing."²

Augustine also had a realistic view of society and of government. In the fourth chapter of Book IV of his work *The City of God*, he states, "And so, justice removed, what are kingdoms but great robber bands? And what are robber bands but small kingdoms?"³ While there are some problems of interpretation in this chapter, Deane argues that it is clear that

At every point there is a parallel between the robber band and the kingdom: both are composed of men, both are ruled by the authority of a leader or prince; both

¹ Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)*, 252. See also LW 27: 228; WA 2: 495 (1519 Galatians Commentary), and Augustine, *De natura et gratia contra Pelagium*, 69, 83, and *passim*.

² As quoted by Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, 310. Quote taken from Augustine, *Epistula*, 185.38. This does not mean, however, that Augustine thought that a person could become perfect and holy "so long as he is separated from the unity of the body" of Christ. It is Christ's presence in the church that makes it holy, despite its human flaws, and it is through the holiness of Christ that the people of God are made holy.

³ Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 4, 4. "Remota itaque iustitia quid sunt regna nisi magna latrocinia? Quia et latrocinia quid sunt nisi parua regna?"

are held together by a *pactum societatis*, a pact of association; in both the spoils are divided in accordance with the rules agreed to by the group.¹

What becomes clear in a cursory reading of Augustine's writings on the state and politics is that his realistic, and somewhat pessimistic view of state and society, and indeed, of human nature, have many similarities with Luther's approach to dealing with the realities of society. Luther's dictum of "calling a thing what it is," is central to the methodology of a theology of the cross, and Augustine seems to have followed the same sort of philosophy in his approach to society.

Augustine's work, *The City of God*, also has some influence on Luther's development of the two-realms theory, although this theory is in opposition to the theology of the cross in many respects, as the discussion on Luther's writings on the peasants' war will show.

These are, of course, only some of the themes which Luther and Augustine have in common. In many cases, Luther appears to borrow these ideas directly from Augustine. In a few cases, Augustine's ideas may have come to Luther through other sources, such as some of the Neoplatonic mysticism as found in Dionysius the Areopagite.² The conclusion that can be drawn, however, is that Luther was indebted to Augustine for many of the seminal ideas which found their way into the theology of the cross. While Luther modified and adapted many of these ideas in ways unknown to Augustine, it is clear that Augustine's theology did have a major impact on Luther's Christology and methodology. Sometimes Luther contradicts Augustine's

¹ Herbert A. Deane, *The Political and Social Ideas of St. Augustine* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 127. See also his discussion on this passage, pp. 126-130. Augustine closes off this chapter by telling a story about Alexander the Great who confronts a pirate who had been seized for terrorizing the seas. Luther obviously likes this story, and retells it in the scholia on Romans 2:1. LW 25: 172; WA 56: 189-90 (Romans Commentary, 1515-1516).

² See here Lienhard, *Luther*, 33-34.

ideas, other times he accepts and modifies them. But Luther is in dialogue with Augustine and many other early church theologians. He is aware of many of Augustine's theological works and commentaries by the time he develops his theology of the cross as a young Doctor of Holy Scripture.

B. Nicholas of Lyra

Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1340), was a Franciscan professor of religion at the University of Paris.¹ He was one of the foremost, if not the foremost, medieval authority on the literal meaning of Scripture.² In fact, one of the more popular couplets of the sixteenth century went so far as to state, "*Si Lyra non lyrasset, totus mundus delirasset, Lutherus non saltasset.*"³ Lyra wrote, among other works, the *Postilla Super Totam Bibliam*, a very careful commentary on the Scriptures, which Luther used frequently. In light of this, it is somewhat surprising that both Jaroslav Pelikan and Heinrich Bornkamm make only passing reference to Lyra in their classic works examining Luther as an interpreter of Scripture.⁴ Moreover, Bernhard Lohse, in noting

¹ Eugene H. Merrill, "Rashi, Nicholas De Lyra, and Christian Exegesis," Westminster Theological Journal 38 (Fall 1975), 70.

² Rega Wood, "Nicholas of Lyra and Lutheran Views on Ecclesiastical Office," Journal of Ecclesiastical History 29 no. 4 (October 1978), 451.

³ Henri Labrosse, "Sources de la biographie de Nicolas de Lyra," Études Franciscaines 16 (1906), 383.

⁴ Pelikan, Luther the Expositor, and Heinrich Bornkamm, Luther and the Old Testament, Eric W. Gritsch and Ruth C. Gritsch, trans., Victor I. Gruhn, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969).

the development of Luther's hermeneutical method, suggests that in terms of overcoming the fourfold sense of Scripture, Luther was less advanced than Lyra.¹

In reading Lyra's comments on some of the central texts for Luther's theology of the cross, there is not much that strikes one as radical or revolutionary. This is not surprising, however, since Lyra consistently stressed the literal meaning of the text. This is one of the things that appealed to Luther. In his comments on Isaiah 45:15 (regarding the hiddenness of God); Luke 1:46ff (the Magnificat); John 1:14 (the word made flesh); 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 (the word of the cross); and Philippians 2:5-11 (Christ's self-emptying and humble obedience), Lyra takes a standard line. Speculative interpretations are put aside in favour of an emphasis on the literal meaning of the text.

In their comments on Matthew 27:46, however, both Lyra and Luther are not afraid to interpret the cry of abandonment by Jesus in a literal sense.² Jesus was indeed abandoned by the Father. On the other hand, Augustine attributed this cry of abandonment to Jesus only *in persona ecclesiae* in his comments on Psalm 22.³ Lyra based his interpretation, in part, on a study of what the sound of the words might be in Hebrew, and concludes that the correct reading of the text makes it clear that "through ignorance of the language of Scripture, the text was corrupted in the latin. Further, it says that Christ was forsaken by God the Father because the

¹ Bernhard Lohse, Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work, Robert C. Schultz, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 146.

² Nicholas of Lyra, Postilla Super Totiam Bibliam, 4 Volumes (Straßburg, 1492. 1971 Reprint by Minerva GmbH., Frankfurt am Main); vol. 4, comments on Matthew 27:46.

³ See here Jouassard, "L'Abandon du Christ," for a more detailed discussion.

Father delivered him into the hands of his killers."¹ Luther's interpretation, therefore, is similar to that of Nicholas of Lyra, and in disagreement with Augustine in this instance.

Similarities are also found in some of the thoughts both Lyra and Luther have toward the distinction between church and state. Lyra rejects, for example, the right of the ecclesiastical powers to hold the temporal sword, since the punishment of the wicked was the duty of princes and not the Pope or his representatives.²

In exploring the possible antecedents or similarities between Lyra and Luther's theology of the cross, there are three things which should be noted. First, Lyra's stress on the literal interpretation of scripture was a principle which is also found in Luther, even though, according to Bornkamm, Luther may have meant something slightly different than Lyra by literal interpretation.³ Second, Lyra, as well as most biblical commentators, often read the Old Testament from a Christological perspective--an approach which Luther develops even further.⁴

¹ Lyra, Postilla, vol 4. Matthew 27: 46. "sed pro ignorantias scriptorum corrupta est littera latinis libris. dicet autem Christus se derelictum a deo pater, quia dimittebat eum in manibus occidentium."

² As noted by Wood, "Nicholas of Lyra," 454. On the same page, note 12, Wood gives a reference from Lyra's Postilla litteras on Matthew 26:52. Lyra writes, "[P]rincipes . . . auctoritatem habent a deo [to use the sword] quia in hoc principes minister De est, ut dicit Paulus."

³ Bornkamm, Luther and the Old Testament, 88. Bornkamm argues that Lyra meant "historical-factual" by "literal," whereas for Luther, "literal" meant more its "literal, prophetic" sense, with its obvious Christological implications. However, Lyra also interprets many passages of the Old Testament "Christologically," although not to the extent of Luther, suggesting that Bornkamm's distinction is somewhat forced.

⁴ For example, it is interesting to compare Lyra's comments on Genesis 28 (Jacob's dream involving a ladder from heaven) with the interpretation given by Luther. Luther accepts Lyra's interpretation that the ladder refers to Christ, based on John 1: 51 (Where Jesus talks about the angels ascending and descending on the son of man). For a comparison of Lyra and Luther on this text, see David C. Steinmetz, "Luther and the Ascent of Jacob's Ladder," Church History 55 no. 2 (June 1986), 185, 188-89. One instance when Luther has a Christological approach
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Third, Lyra, with his stress on the literal interpretation and his Christological perspective, is willing to take seriously Christ's cry of abandonment on the cross. Luther follows suit. Whether Luther's interpretation of this text was influenced primarily by Lyra, however, is uncertain. What can be said is that the careful work found in the commentaries of Lyra did not go unnoticed by Luther. Nevertheless, to determine how influential certain themes in Lyra were for the development of Luther's theology of the cross would require much further study.

IV. ANTECEDENTS FROM MYSTICAL THEOLOGY

One task which needs to be done in any attempt to explore sources of Luther's theology of the cross is to carefully study the influence of the mystics. For example, while it has been observed that "medieval mystical writings uniquely contain the raw material of dissent,"¹ how much of this raw material Luther relied upon is difficult to determine. Moreover, while it is generally acknowledged that the young Luther was influenced by the mystics, there has been a lively debate among Luther scholars over the question of how much influence they had upon Luther's theology after the initial reformation period. Hoffman argues, for example, that Adolf Harnack, Karl Holl, Nathan Söderblom, Gustaf Ljunggren, Heinrich Bornkamm, Gerhard Ebeling, and Wilfred Joest are representative of those who suggest that only the young Luther

⁴(...continued)

when Lyra does not is found in their comments on Genesis 3:15. Luther sees this as a promise about Christ, whereas Lyra and others, including Augustine and Gregory, related this promise to Mary. See here Bornkamm, Luther and the Old Testament, 101.

¹ Steven E. Ozment, Mysticism and Dissent: Religious Ideology and Social Protest in the Sixteenth Century (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 12. See also pp. 1-2.

was influenced by the mystics, while Rudolf Otto, Erich Vogelsang, Erwin Iserloh and Heiko Oberman are among those who argue that Luther never rejected mysticism.¹ There are at least two factors which contribute to this diversity of opinion: one, the term mysticism is not clearly defined, leading to widely divergent working definitions; and two, distinctions are not made between various types of mysticism.

Hoffman addresses the first factor by arguing that Luther, borrowing from Bernard of Clairvaux, "had this definition of mysticism—mystical theology is experience, not doctrine."² With this working definition of mysticism, it is easy to argue that Luther indeed accepted mystical theology throughout his lifetime.

Erich Vogelsang addressed the second factor, by distinguishing between three types of mysticism: Dionysian, Roman, and German.³ He argues that while Luther rejected the

¹ Bengt R. Hoffman, Luther and the Mystics (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), 111-12. Bengt Hägglund argues much the same thing, suggesting that this rejection of mystical theology is first found in liberal theology, but is carried on in dialectical theology. Hägglund, The Background of Luther's Doctrine of Justification, 2-4.

² Hoffman, Luther and the Mystics, 117. Cf. WA 3: 640.40 (First Psalms Commentary, 1514) and WA 43: 581.11 (Genesis Lectures of 1543). Hoffman appears to have borrowed this distinction from Erich Vogelsang, "Luther und die Mystik," Lutherjahrbuch 19 (1937), 35. This distinction is also used by Oberman, "*Simul Gemitus et Raptus*: Luther and Mysticism," The Reformation in Medieval Perspective, Steven E. Ozment, ed. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 223.

The assertion that mystical theology is experience rather than doctrine is misleading, however. Luther did not oppose doctrine to experience. As will be shown, the doctrines of the Incarnation and of Atonement were very important—in fact central to his theology of the cross. Hoffman, therefore, misrepresents both Luther and many of the mystics themselves, by trying to contrast experience to doctrine. It would have been more accurate to juxtapose experience to abstract philosophical speculation or intellectual, "ivory tower" thought which would disdain experience. Steinmetz, for example, opposes experience to theory, which is more accurate than the wording of Vogelsang et al. David C. Steinmetz, Luther and Staupitz: An Essay on the Intellectual Origins of the Protestant Reformation. Duke Monographs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies, No. 4 (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1980), 126-7.

³ Vogelsang, "Luther und die Mystik," 32-54.

Dionysian form of mysticism, he agreed somewhat with the Roman mystics, and he found much to agree with in the German mystics.¹ Yet the precise relationship between Luther and the mystics requires further study, since there are certain themes from each of these categories of mystics which are found in Luther's theology of the cross. Whether Luther accepted these themes in a way identical with what the mystics intended by them, or whether he radically altered these themes while using similar terminology only adds to the complexity of determining precisely the relationship between the mystics and Luther. To address these issues, therefore, the various types of mystics must be studied in an attempt to discover similarities between their theology and Luther's *theologia crucis*. In order to provide order and structure to this endeavour, Vogelsang's distinctions will be used.

A. Dionysian Mysticism

The main theme which Luther had in common with Dionysius the Areopagite (5-6th C. C.E.) was his stress on a "*theologia negativa*" and its association with the hiddenness of God. Luther writes, "therefore blessed Dionysius teaches that one must enter into analogical darkness [the mystical shadows] and ascend by way of darkness. For thus God is hidden and beyond

¹ While this classification of the mystics is helpful, it is an oversimplification. Oberman, for one, argues that Vogelsang's chronological distinctions and his classification of individual mystics must be questioned. Oberman, "Simul gemitus et raptus," 223, 226-30.

understanding."¹ On the other hand, Luther also felt that affirmative theology (the opposite of negative theology) was imperfect and assumed to know too much about divine matters.²

While Luther accepts this "negative theology," he also has some critical things to say about Dionysian mysticism. He felt, for example, that it was insufficiently concerned with the Incarnation and the crucified Christ,³ thereby making it vulnerable to a speculative theology

¹ WA 3: 124.32ff; LW 10: 119-20. (First Psalms Commentary, 1513-15). Herbert David Rix also notes the similarities: "[Luther] admires Dionysius' 'negative theology', that is, the neoplatonic approach to the utter transcendence and incomprehensibility of the Godhead which asserts that all that can be known of God is what he is not." Rix, Martin Luther: the Man and the Image (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1983), 32.

Jean Gerson, another medieval mystic, accepts this approach of Dionysius. He writes, "The blessed Dionysius makes it clear in the first chapter of his treatise, On Divine Names, that 'under no circumstances should one dare speak or even think anything about the transubstantial and hidden nature of God except those little things which have been clearly exhibited to us by divine providence through the words of the Saints' [literally, 'through holy utterances']." ["Universaliter, inquit, non est audendum dicere neque etiam cogitare de supersubstantiali et occulta deitate, praeter ea quae divinitus nobis ex sanctis eloquiis sunt expressa." Cf. Dionysius, De Divinis nominibus 1113 A-B]. Jean Gerson, "*Contra curiositatem studentium*" (Against the Curiosity of Scholars), Jean Gerson, Steven E. Ozment, ed. and trans., *Textus Minores* Vol. 38 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 41.

Steinmetz also sees the similarity of these themes between Dionysius and Luther. He writes, "Like Dionysius, Luther is struck by the hiddenness of God and the superiority of negative theology over positive. But there the similarities end and the differences begin to multiply." *Ibid.*, Luther and Staupitz, 136. He suggests that the main difference is that for Dionysius, God is hidden in darkness because of his transcendence, whereas for Luther, God's hiddenness is defined in terms of faith, which deals with things not seen. While there is the sense of God being transcendent and dwelling in the darkness in Luther, it is overshadowed by his emphasis on God being hidden to those only without "eyes of faith." Another difference, which Luther points out, is that "those who follow the mystical theology and struggle in inner darkness, [omit] all pictures of Christ's suffering.... For the Incarnate Word is first necessary for the purity of the heart . . ." LW 25: 287; WA 56: 300 (1515-1516 Romans Commentary).

² LW 10: 313; WA 3: 371 (First Psalm Commentary, 1513-1515).

³ LW 25: 287; WA 56: 300 (1515-1516 Romans Commentary). Elsewhere, Luther writes, "Dionysius, who wrote about 'negative theology' and 'affirmative theology,' deserves to be ridiculed. . . . But if we wish to give a true definition of 'negative theology,' we should say that it is the holy cross and the afflictions in which we do not, it is true, discern God, but in which those signs are present of which I have already spoken." LW 13: 110f; WA 40/III: 543.8ff (First
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based on idle dreams.¹ Second, Iserloh argues that Luther settles for a "way of the contrary" rather than a *via negativa*, as suggested by Dionysius. Third, according to Iserloh, "Luther rejects any speculation which seeks union with God independently of the Incarnate Christ."² He would include Dionysius among those who followed such speculation.

B. Roman Mysticism.

1. **Bernard of Clairvaux.** Luther had many good things to say about Bernard (1090-1153). Unlike Dionysius, Bernard made many allusions to the incarnate and crucified Christ,³ as well as to the themes of judgement⁴ and the need for experience.⁵ This emphasis on the

³(...continued)

Psalms Commentary, 1513-1515). See also Vogelsang, "Luther und die Mystik", 32-33. Cf. Hoffman, Luther and the Mystics, 120. Hoffman later states, "Dionysius, one of the suspects among mystics, does not seem to have discovered Christ." *Ibid.*, 193.

¹ Hoffman, Luther and the Mystics, 120.

² Iserloh, "Luther's Christ-Mysticism," 40. In this same article, Iserloh notes that in the 1537 "First Disputation Against the Antinomians" (WA 39/I: 389.18ff), Luther speaks of the spiritual harm he suffered by trying to follow Dionysius' approach in achieving direct union with God, apart from Christ. (p. 175, n. 30). See also Lienhard, Luther, 32-3.

³ As Pelikan notes, Bernard felt that "True believers knew how much they needed the cross of Christ when they 'admired and embraced transcendent love in him.' . . . it was the crucifixion that served as the revelation of the way and will of God, even for those who were not able to penetrate the mysteries of that will." Pelikan, The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300), 151. See also Bernard of Clairvaux, "On the Love of God," 3.7., in Sancti Bernardi Opera, Jean Leclercq and Henri Rochais, eds. (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957-), vol. 3, 124; and "Sermons on the Song of Songs," 64.4.6., in Sancti Bernardi Opera, vol 2, 159.

⁴ As Pelikan notes, The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300), The Christian Tradition, 157. "Seen in the light of Christ, 'mercy and judgement are the two feet of God'." Bernard, "Sermons on Diverse Topics," 90.1, Sancti Bernardi Opera, Vol 6/I, 337.

⁵ See here the evaluation made by Vogelsang, "Luther und die Mystik," 35. As has already been noted, Luther seems to have based his definition of mysticism on Bernard's definition.

incarnation is a major theme in Luther's theology of the cross. Bernard also was not afraid to focus on the sufferings of Christ. Pelikan aptly summarizes Bernard's thoughts as follows:

"What," he could ask, "is so effective for the healing of the wounds of conscience and for the purification of the intention of the soul as constant meditation on the wounds of Christ?" The "wounds of the Savior" were the only refuge of the weak and weary, his passion "the last refuge and the only remedy." The faithful soul could enjoy the presence of Christ and could look forward in hope to the vision of the glory of God by glorying in the ignominy of the cross.¹

This focusing on the "wounds" of Christ was the same advice that von Staupitz gave to Luther on many occasions.

One other theme in Bernard is significant in looking at Luther's theology of the cross; that of inversions or reversals. For Bernard, Christ exchanges his glory for ignominy, and his glorious titles which connote "majesty and power" are exchanged for the title of "Jesus" or "Immanuel," which represents "kindness and grace."²

2. Brethren of the Common Life. While not ordinarily regarded as mystics, the Brethren's emphasis on the experiential fits the definition of mystical used by both Bernard and Luther. Gerte Groote (1340-1384), who founded this group, rejected both the methodology and the conclusions of speculative theology.³ Emphasis was also placed on imitating the humanity

¹ Pelikan, The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300), 155. References to Bernard are from: "Sermons on the Song of Songs," 62.4.7; 61.2.3; and 22.3.8, in Sancti Bernardi Opera, vol. 2: 159; vol 2: 150; and vol. 1: 134; and "On the Love of God," 4.12, in Sancti Bernardi Opera, vol. 3: 129.

² Pelikan, The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300), 155. Bernard also says, "And so instead of the Paradise that we had lost, Christ the Savior has been regained." "Sermons on Diverse Topics," 96.1, Sancti Bernardi Opera, 6/I: 355. See also his discussion on the names of God in "Sermons on the Song of Songs," 15., Sancti Bernardi Opera, 1: 82-88.

³ Otto Gründler, "Devotio Moderna," Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation, Jill Raitt, ed. Vol. 17, World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest. Ewert Cousins, gen. ed. (New York: Crossroads, 1987), 180.

of Christ, especially Christ's passion.¹ As Groote says, "the cross of Christ must be built by ruminating on the passion."² One of the Brethren, Thomas à Kempis (1379-1471), talks often about the "way of the cross" (the *via crucis*), and Luther was likely referring to his work, The Imitation of Christ, whenever he used this term prior to 1518.³ However, while the Brethren may have had some influence on Luther, it is impossible to trace this with any degree of accuracy.⁴

¹ Gründler, "Devotio Moderna," 189-91. Gründler argues, however, that because the Brethren sought to practice the *via antiqua* both inside and outside of the cloister, it neither foreshadowed nor embraced the Reformation. (Ibid., 190)

² Gerte Groote, Gerardi Magni epistolae, W. Mulder, ed. (Antwerp: Editricis Neerlandiae, 1933) n. 62, pp. 232-43. See also Gründler, "Devotio Moderna," 180.

Scholars have argued over the idea of the imitation of Christ and Conformity to Christ in Luther. While it is an oversimplification of a very complex topic, it appears that Luther accepted the idea of the imitation of Christ, similar to that of Thomas à Kempis, but as he developed his understanding of justification, he began to stress that the *imitatio Christi* does not proceed, but rather follows from a *conformitas Christi*. He does not reject the idea of *imitatio Christi*, however: his theology of the cross, in fact, involves bearing the cross by Christians, just as Christ did. Christ's cross involves his followers. Dietmar Lage, for one, argues that Luther "did not reject the idea of *imitatio* as he did not reject the law. Luther's theological ethics required that Christians perform good works and the *imitatio Christi* is maintained to provide guidance and direction for those works to be performed." Lage does agree, however, that "the *imitatio* is incompatible with Luther's doctrines of sin, faith and grace." Dietmar Lage, Martin Luther's Christology and Ethics, Texts and Studies in Religion, Vol. 45 (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 5. It is questionable, however, if one can separate these themes from one another in Luther's writings: that does not appear to be Luther's style or intent. Such a distinction would also ignore the significance of Luther's *simul iustus et peccator* paradox.

³ Rix, Luther, 29-30.

⁴ It should be noted that one of the indirect influences of this group upon many of the Roman mystics as well as many humanists has not been fully explored. Many of the humanists studied at one time or another in a school run by the Brethren of the Common Life. Rudolph Agricola (d. 1485), Jakob Wimpheling (d. 1528), Johannes Reuchlin (d. 1522), Luther and Erasmus all spent some time in a school run by the Brethren. See Harold J. Grimm, The Reformation Era: 1500-1650 Second Edition (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1973) 58-60. Cf. Joseph Lortz, The Reformation in Germany, 2 vol., Roland Walls, trans. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd; New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), vol. I, 59ff. How much the humanist's cry, "back to the sources!" is due to the Brethren is also unknown.

3. **Jean Gerson.** Gerson (1363-1429), a professor and later chancellor of the University in Paris, was, in Vogelsang's terms, a "Roman" mystic. Ozment notes, for example, that Gerson, in his critique of scholasticism, lists seven differences between scholasticism and mysticism.¹ He also critiques the scholastics for misplaced curiosity and singularity,² arguing that they tried to grasp the image of God which God had chosen to keep hidden from them.³

In his *Contra Curiositatem Studentium*, Gerson critiques the scholastics of his day who were speculating on things which belonged solely to the utterly free will of God (the *potentia Dei absoluta*).⁴ He suggests instead that they should focus on what God has actually established in

¹ Steven E. Ozment, *Homo Spiritualis: A Comparative Study of the Anthropology of Johannes Tauler, Jean Gerson and Martin Luther (1509 - 1516) in the Context of Their Theological Thought* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 52-3. Besides arguing that scholastic theology focused on intellectual powers while mysticism on the affective, Gerson also makes the telling point that mysticism was more democratic--available to everyone, and not just to an elite with extensive educational training.

Ozment also suggests that mysticism was a potent weapon against the tendencies of some scholastics to overlook the essence of Christian truth (which is love and union with God) while getting caught up in "penultimate pursuits." Idem, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 9.

² Gerson, *Contra Curiositatem Studentium*, 27-9.

³ Ibid., 33.

⁴ Ibid., 32-33. Ozment argues that there was a controversy over the two themes of the *potentia Dei ordinata* and the *potentia Dei absoluta*. He suggests that the *potentia Dei absoluta* (which stressed God's absolute freedom), was favoured by the mystics, because they had come to associate the *potentia Dei ordinata* (which stressed God's reliability and consistency in dealing with humanity) with the church's doctrines and sacraments, and had therefore come to represent the ecclesiastical "establishment." Ozment, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 1-2. As such, the mystics felt that this *potentia Dei ordinata* had become very restrictive. Thus, they focused on the *potentia Dei absoluta*, which provided a means to break from the intellectually controlled images of God put forth by certain scholastics (often the nominalists of the 14th and 15th centuries).

Interestingly enough, Gerson's critique, concerning the power of God, differs radically from Ozment's interpretation. Gerson does not interpret these two powers of God in terms of justification for dissent, as seen in the above reference. Even in his work *Homo Spiritualis*, the closest Ozment comes to linking Gerson with the idea that the *potentia Dei ordinata* represented the ecclesiastical "establishment" is in his suggestion that for Gerson, there was a parallel between
(continued...)

God's revealed and natural laws (the *potentia Dei ordinata*).¹ Luther reveals a similar approach in his distinction between the hidden and revealed God, by emphasizing the Incarnate God rather than the God that is unknown in the heavens: "Through the Crucified One, the Christian knows everything he has to know, but he now also knows what he cannot know."²

It is Gerson who introduces a critique of Dionysius that is also found in Luther. As Ozment states;

Gerson is most emphatic about the distinctiveness and integrity of the cognitive content of mystical theology. He registers disagreement with Dionysius the

⁴(...continued)

the *potentia Dei ordinata* of the nominalists and his own *lex communis*. (Ozment, Homo Spiritualis, 58, n. 1). This does not mean that Gerson associated the *potentia Dei ordinata* with a corrupt ecclesiastical "establishment," however. Furthermore, Gerson's critique concerns those who would focus on the *potentia Dei absoluta* to the neglect of the *potentia Dei ordinata*--the opposite of what one should expect from a mystic, according to Ozment's formulation.

The proposal by Ozment concerning God's two powers also overlooks the fact that for Thomas Aquinas, Gerson, and many others, the Scriptures are the primary record of what God has done and will do by his ordained power. A majority of the mystics, including Gerson, did not reject the Scriptures or the long tradition of the church in interpreting these Scriptures. They rejected, therefore, not the "establishment," but certain unhelpful practices which were found in the "establishment" at that particular period in time, which were contrary to the Scriptures and the *potentia Dei ordinata* revealed in them. It would appear, therefore, that Ozment is trying to establish the radical distance between the "establishment" and the dissenting--and later, reforming--trends of the church, to the detriment of their similarities and common themes.

For a clear description of the *potentia Dei absoluta* and *potentia Dei ordinata*, see Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, Vol. 1. The Beginnings to the Reformation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 119-128.

¹ Ozment, Gerson, note 10, p. 83. Gerson notes, for example, "Porro si philosophi se inter hos limites coarctassent, et Deum sic cognitum ut dignum fuerat, glorificassent, bene erat cum eis; sed pergere ultra volentes "defecerunt scrutantes scrutinio" (Ps. 63.7). Gerson, *Contra Curiositatem Studentium*, 32-33.

² WA 18: 689.24f; LW 33: 146 ("The Bondage of the Will", 1525). Luther goes on to criticize the artificial distinction between the *potentia Dei absoluta et ordinata*. LW 33: 190.

Reinhold Seeberg is one scholar who sees the similarities noted here. R. Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* 4th ed., 5 vols. (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1933), Vol 4/I, 182. For a brief summary of these themes, see Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, 67, 169-72.

Areopagite to the extent that the "negative way" of the latter implies the forfeiture of a positive, experiential knowledge of God.¹

Entering into the darkness, however, did not mean a rejection of any knowledge of God gained through natural revelation. What is significant for Gerson and Luther is the positive, experiential knowledge of God which comes through the Incarnation.

4. **Nicolas of Cusa.** It is through the writings of Stapulensis that Luther came into contact with another mystic, the German Cardinal Nicolas of Cusa (1401-1464). His theme of the "simultaneity of opposites" (*coincidentia oppositorum*), is reflected in modified form in Luther's teaching about *simul justus et peccator*² and in the revealing concealment of God in the Incarnation.³ Luther's ideas about the hiddenness of God are similar to many of Nicolas of

¹ Ozment, Homo Spiritualis, 50. Moltmann, for example, in his many references to Luther's theology of the cross, reflects Gerson's theme in suggesting that "the theology of the cross is none other than the reverse side of the Christian theology of hope." Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology, R. A. Wilson and John Bowden, trans. (New York: Harper & Row; London: SCM, 1974), 5.

² One of the main differences between Nicholas of Cusa and Luther, however, was that Cusa does not hold that two presumably contradictory forms can exist simultaneously in the same subject. More study needs to be done to determine whether Luther's teaching that a person can be simultaneously a sinner and a saint is really in opposition to Cusa and the Catholic tradition. Both Karl Rahner and Otto Hermann Pesch suggest, for example, some areas of divergence. Rahner, "Simul iustus et peccator," Dictionary of Theology, Second Edition. Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, eds. (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 475-6; and Pesch, "Existential and Sapiential Theology—the Theological Confrontation between Luther and Thomas Aquinas," Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther, Jared Wicks, ed. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1970), 69ff, 190f, n. 38. Cf. Peter Manns, "Absolute and Incarnate Faith—Luther on Justification in the Galatians Commentary of 1531-1535," Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther, 156.

³ Ozment, Homo Spiritualis, 179-80. For another description of the term, see Alois Maria Haas, "Schools of Late Medieval Mysticism," Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation, Jill Raitt, ed.; Vol 17, World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest. Ewert Cousins, gen. ed. (New York: Crossroads, 1987), 171-2.

It also appears that the term *coincidentia oppositorum* influenced Stapulensis' understanding of the proper and alien works of God, a term which Luther develops in his
(continued...)

Cusa's thoughts on the subject.¹ Both Luther and Cusa understood the Incarnation as a revealing concealment of God, and they both argued that all knowledge of God must come from God himself.² These themes, in turn, affect one's understanding of the "Word" of God.³

Luther differed with Nicolas of Cusa, however, on two things. First, Luther developed the theme of "at the same time despair and faith," which was not present in Cusa.⁴ Second, Luther places much more emphasis than does Nicolas of Cusa on exploring some of the implications of the Incarnation as the central revelation of God.

5. Jacobus Faber Stapulensis. Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (c. 1455-1536), better known by his latinized name, Stapulensis, was another "Roman" mystic. At the heart of his "*imitatio Christi*" was the concept of the *descensus ad infernum* (the descent into hell). Following Christ involves a descent into hell, of entering into the darkness.⁵ For Stapulensis, as Lage notes,

It is by means of the suffering and humiliation of the *descensus ad infernum* that Christians are cleansed and purged and then resurrected and justified in imitation of the paradigmatic event. By means of the descent into hell, one is brought to

³(...continued)

theology of the cross. See Reinhold Weier, Das Thema vom verborgenen Gott von Nikolaus von Kues zu Martin Luther (Münster Westfalen: Verlag Aschendorff, 1967), 201-02.

¹ As Weier notes, Luther did not get this idea directly from Nicolas; it came through Stapulensis, who ironically does not use the theme himself. Weier also notes that this theme of God's hiddenness is common in scripture, and was espoused by many Ockhamists prior to Luther. Weier, Das Thema vom verborgenen Gott, 8, 74-5, 208.

² Ibid., 208.

³ Ibid., 207.

⁴ Ibid., 207.

⁵ Here, of course we find again the theme of the *negativa theologia* of Dionysius and others. See Lage, Luther's Christology, 55. Tauler and Staupitz, among others, are also proponents of the theme of descent into hell. See Ozment, Homo Spiritualis, 214-15.

the depths of despair, the lowest levels of existence, to hell and back, as was the primary exemplar, Jesus Christ.¹

This theme of the descent into hell is also connected to three other themes important to Stapulensis; the *via contrarii* of salvation, the emphasis on *humilitas*, and the *Deus absconditus sub contrario*. All of these themes were "aspects of a general theological motif that Luther was later to refer to as a *theologia crucis*."²

Stapulensis, like Luther, also placed a great emphasis on the centrality of Christology.

Lage correctly recognizes this when he writes,

Stapulensis' exegesis of Scripture was dominated by Christological concerns. His purpose was to reveal the paradigmatic figure of Christ, which he held was hidden throughout Scripture, in even the most unlikely places. He attempted to delineate fully the form of Christ for the purpose of devotion and imitation.³

While Luther has many themes in common with Stapulensis, there are also some important differences. He considered Stapulensis' focus on *synteresis*, for example, as suspect to metaphysical speculation, and in danger of suggesting that people could choose their own means of salvation.⁴ The other major concern Luther had with Stapulensis concerned the descent into hell. While Luther agreed with this idea, he was also careful to underline the fact that

¹ Lage, *Luther's Christology*, 55.

² *Ibid.*, 63.

³ *Ibid.*, 53. This Christological concern is clearly reflected in Luther's commentaries. He regularly used Stapulensis' commentaries on the Psalms and Romans as a basis for his own lectures. The use, by Luther, of Stapulensis' exegetical works (especially the *Quincuplex Psalter* and his commentary on Romans) is well documented in Weier, *Das Thema vom verborgenen Gott*.

⁴ Lage, *Luther's Christology*, 61.

imitating Christ in this way does not save a person. The *descensus ad infernum* was not an act of merit.¹

6. **Summary.** It becomes clear that even in the limited number of Roman mystics referred to in passing, there are some themes common to Luther and them. The ideas of the hiddenness of God, of the *descensus ad infernum*, along with the attendant themes of the *via contrarii*, and the developing theme of the focus on Christology or of the humanity of Christ, all surface again in various forms in Luther's theology of the cross. But Luther did not accept Roman mysticism uncritically. He felt, for one thing, that this "Roman" or "Latin" form of mysticism paid too little attention to the incarnated word.² As Steinmetz notes:

While Luther said an unambiguous "no" to Dionysian mysticism, he said both a "yes" and "no" to Latin [Romanic] mysticism. Luther approved of its stress on the humanity of Jesus and of its emphasis on experience rather than mystical theory. He distrusted, however, its use of erotic metaphors and its vision of an ecstatic union with the uncreated Word. He also missed among its exponents any sense of *Anfechtung*, of the desperate inner conflict which the soul sometimes experiences when faith and unbelief hang in the balance.³

¹ Lienhard, Luther, 48.

² WA 56: 299-300; LW 25: 287 (Romans Commentary, 1515-16). See also Hoffman, Luther and the Mystics, 111.

³ Steinmetz, Luther and Staupitz, 126-7. Cf. Vogelsang, "Luther und die Mystik." Heiko Oberman also argues that Luther rejects any mysticism which bypasses the Incarnation. Oberman, "*Simul Gemitus et Raptus*" 219-51; especially 223, 231-32.

It must be said, however, that present in the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux was the theme of *Anfechtung*. Bernard's advice to focus on the "wounds of Christ." Sermons on the Song of Songs, 61.2.3; and 62.4.7, in Sancti Bernardi Opera, vol. 2, pp. 150, 159) when in the midst of personal struggles would exclude him from this criticism. This was very similar to the advice that von Staupitz gave Luther in the midst of his early *Anfechtung*.

C. German Mystics.

A preliminary reading of Luther in regard to mysticism reveals that there are three basic sources of German mysticism which he relies on: the writings of Johannes Tauler, the anonymously written *Eyn Deutsch Theologia* (also known as the *Theologia Germanica*), and his mentor and vicar-general in the Augustinian Order, Johannes von Staupitz.

1. **Johannes Tauler.** Luther became aware of the writings of the Dominican mystic Tauler (ca. 1300-1361) through his friend Johannes Lang.¹ Tauler, like Luther, held simple, clear preaching in high esteem; but they also shared some theological themes.²

In Tauler one finds hints of *sola gratia*, which becomes a key theme for Luther.³ On the other hand, Ozment also finds references in Tauler to the need for preparatory human activity in receiving grace—even to the extent that Tauler can talk about the acquisition of God's grace in terms of a good business deal or bargain (*ein gelich kauf*).⁴ Overall, however, Tauler and the

¹ Gordon Rupp, Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms, 1521 (London: SCM Press, 1951), 43. Walther von Loewenich suggests that Luther was introduced to Tauler about 1515. von Loewenich, Luther's Theology of the Cross, Herbert J. Bouman, trans. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), 152ff.

² Their preaching (in German) was uncomplicated, clear and concise, deliberately steering away from intricate or complicated theological arguments. A quick reading of Tauler's sermons reveal this simplicity and desire to stick to the proclamation of the faith in a way that the parishioners could understand. See also Josef Schmidt "Introduction," Johannes Tauler: Sermons, Maria Schrady, trans., Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1985), 9-20. The standard works to be consulted for his sermons are Die Predigten Taulers, Ferdinand Vetter, ed., (Berlin: Weidmann, 1910; reprinted in Dublin: Weidmann, 1968); and Johannes Taulers Predigten, Georg Hofmann, ed., (Freiburg: Herder, 1961). While Vetter's edition is a good critical edition, unfortunately it does not contain all of Tauler's sermons.

³ Tauler, Die Predigten Taulers (Vetter edition), 64.11ff; 73.32-74; 97.1ff; 123.6ff. Cf. Ozment, Homo Spiritualis, 30-31; and Hoffman, Luther and the Mystics, 145.

⁴ Tauler, Die Predigten Taulers (Vetter edition), 231.14ff; "Die nidersten krefte die wil er ziehen in die obersten, mit den nidersten die obersten fueren in sich. Tuon wir das, so wil er uns och nach im ziehen in sin aller oberstes und in sin jungstes. Wan das mus von not sin: süllen
(continued...)

other German mystics were much closer to Luther's understanding of salvation than some of the other mystics.¹

Lage suggests that another theme which Luther liked in the writings of Tauler was his Christological emphasis,² and in particular, his emphasis on the cross.³ Furthermore, Tauler argues that to follow Christ involves confronting the realities of his cross for us, and its consequent *Anfechtung*:

Remember to find the Cross in trials and temptations rather than in the full bloom of sentimental emotion. For we must always continue to carry the Cross It is not by high emotions but by the Cross that we follow God.⁴

The *via crucis* calls one into an involvement with this world rather than an escape from it through theological speculations.

Tauler also emphasized a version of the "negative theology." This included the *resignatio* motif,⁵ of entering death in order to live. It is also reflected in his understanding of the alien

⁴(...continued)

wir dar in komen und do sin, so mus ich in von not hie nemen in das min. Nu als vil des minen, als vil denne des sinen: das ist ein gelich kauf." Cf. Ozment, *Homo Spiritualis*, 32.

¹ Hermann Hering, *Die Mystik Luthers* (Leipzig: J. L. Hinrich, 1879), 52. Cf. Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics*, 160. See also WABr 1: 160.3-28 (Letter to Staupitz, April, 1518).

² "In Tauler, Luther found a Christological orientation distinct from that advocated by the medieval scholastic traditions. Its unique feature was that, while the understanding of the *unio mystica* remained theocentric, the understanding of *conformitas* was Christocentric --a *conformitas Christi* rather than a *conformitas Dei*." Lage, *Luther's Christology*, 79. Lage does not state, however the basis for his conclusion that the medieval scholastic tradition was theocentric, other than a vague reference to the nuptial imagery which was used. *Ibid.*, 91, n. 35.

³ See also Bengt Hoffman: "For Tauler the cross and the resurrection are at the centre." Hoffman, "Introduction," *The Theologia Germanica of Martin Luther*, Classics of Western Spirituality, Richard J. Payne, gen. ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 19.

⁴ Tauler, *Johannes Tauler: Sermons*, 166. Sermon 59.

⁵ Ozment, *Homo Spiritualis*, 214.

and proper works of God,¹ and of God's working in our lives beneath contrary experiences.²

The Christian must be emptied in order to be filled, to sink into the ground of our being before ascending to God.³ It is nothing short of a great reversal.

While Tauler, like other mystics, emphasized union with God, there are also differences between them. For example, Tauler does not say that "union" implies that God and the human become one. Rather, while there is a *weselicke gelicheit* between God and humanity,⁴ even in the midst of this union with God the great differences between the creature and the creator are not dissolved.⁵

There is no doubt that Luther and Tauler have much in common. Yet this does not mean that their thought is always in agreement. Luther, for example, drastically alters some of the themes of Tauler, regarding *synteresis*, the *resignatio voluntatis*, and *Gelassenheit*. He finds these ideas incompatible with his understanding of grace, and in the end, his understanding of the *homo spiritualis* is defined by faith (*fides*) rather than by the terms Tauler used to denote the

¹ As Lage notes, "Luther first read of the alien and proper work of God in Tauler's *Sermons*, as he acknowledges in his marginalia (WA 9: 95ff)." Lage, *Luther's Christology*, 76.

² Jared Wicks, *Man Yearning for Grace: Luther's Early Spiritual Teaching* (Washington: Corpus Books, 1968), 145-46. See also Luther's marginal notes on Tauler's sermons of 1515-1516 in WA 9: 101.33 and WA 4: 469.7. This sermon is also found in *Die Predigten Taulers* (Vetter edition), 170-176. Cf. Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics*, 139ff.

³ Tauler, *Johannes Tauler: Sermons*. Sermon 1, p.38; Sermon 37, p. 126. Tauler acknowledges that this theme is taken from Augustine.

⁴ Ozment, *Homo Spiritualis*, 179-80.

⁵ Tauler, *Johannes Taulers Predigten* (Hofmann edition), 405. See also Hoffman, *Luther and the Mystics*, 131-36. For a different view, see Ozment, *Homo Spiritualis*, 42. He writes, "while [Tauler and Gerson] consider man's union with God in this life to be the attainment of maximum similitude with God, Luther understands man's union with God to be *simultaneously* the full recognition of man's unlikeness and opposition to God." *Ibid.*, 215.

basis for conformity to Christ.¹ Because of this, and also due to his historical research, von Loewenich argues that "Luther's theology of the cross cannot be traced back to a direct influence on the part of Tauler."²

2. *Theologia Germanica*. A second source of German mysticism which influenced Luther was the *Theologia Germanica*. Luther had this work published twice, each time adding a preface which revealed his strong approval of the work.³ Ozment suggests that this anonymous work

functioned more as a declaration of dissent than as a guide for peaceful meditation and ethical sanctification. Those who edited, praised and read it were those who had parted ways with the ecclesiastical establishment(s) of the sixteenth century.⁴

¹ Lage, *Luther's Christology*, 84.

² von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 153. However, in the addendum to the 4th volume of the German edition of this work (reprinted at the back of the English translation), von Loewenich is much more favourable to Tauler, even suggesting that "Luther's Christ mysticism is not really so far removed from that of a Tauler." *Ibid.*, 222.

³ While the first publication of 1516 contained only parts of the complete work, the 1518 edition was much more complete. Ozment, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 17-21. Cf. Hoffman, "Introduction," for an analysis of these differences.

Many of the themes found in the *Theologia Germanica* are also found in the writings of Tauler, which may be one reason that Luther on at least one occasion suggested that Tauler might have had something to do with its composition. Cf. WA 1: 153. For an English translation, see Hoffman, "Introduction," 42.

⁴ Ozment, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 15. He suggests that one reason for the popularity of the German Theology was the critique it levelled on the ecclesiastical establishment. Ozment writes, "The *German Theology* subserved the need to reinterpret the *potentia Dei ordinata*, to redefine the ecclesiopolitical 'establishment'. The explanation of its popularity in the sixteenth century most clearly emerges in the context of the struggle involved in the redefinition of religious authority." *Ibid.*, 17.

Hoffman, on the other hand, suggests that the German Theology "was written in large part to counteract the influence of the so-called Free Spirits," who were "libertinistic, antinomian, and antichurch" ("Introduction," 7). If such is indeed the case, then Ozment is suggesting the the German Theology was being used for the complete opposite reason of its original purpose!
(continued...)

In many regards this is true. Yet Luther was also able to argue, in his preface to the 1518 edition, that far from being innovative, the Wittenberg theology only recapitulates the *Theologia Germanica*, which in turn can claim to come from the "best biblical and traditional lineage."¹

The *Theologia Germanica* argues that suffering is the norm of life, even though one might try avoid it (Chapters 18, 38),² and that the Christian is to be free from the fear of hell and a selfish desire for eternal rewards (chapters 10, 11). Rather, the Christian is to live with a trust in God and at the same time an involvement in life.³ As Hoffman argues, the "*Theologia* ascribes a profound significance to the material existence and this significance is positive, not negative. In fact, life on earth is an essential part of 'God Himself'."⁴ Because of this emphasis, one can also discern some of the background which Luther draws on for his treatise on *The Freedom of A Christian*, written in 1520.⁵ It will also become clear that when Luther's *theologia crucis* is explored more fully, there are methodological and theological similarities

⁴(...continued)

It seems to be the case that even if Ozment is correct in suggesting that this treatise was used during the 1520's and following as a treatise of dissent, that was not its original intention. A critique of Ozment's interpretation of the *potentia Dei ordinata* in the context mentioned here was discussed above.

¹ LW 31: 75-6; WA 1: 378ff (Preface, 1518). Cf. Ozment, *Mysticism and Dissent*, 20.

² References here refer to Chapters in the *Theologia Germanica*. It can be found in WA 1: 378-389, or Hoffman, ed., *The Theologia Germanica of Martin Luther*.

³ See also Haas, "Schools of Late Medieval Mysticism," 160-61.

⁴ Hoffman, "Introduction," 35.

⁵ LW 31: 333-377; WA 7: 49-73 (Latin Text); WA 7: 20-38 (German Text). Cf. Hoffman, "Introduction," 38-9. Hoffman writes, "Martin Luther summed up the problem of order in man's life by saying that a Christian is the freest person of all and bound to none but also the most bound of all and subject to all. A goodly portion of this hard-to-grasp truth is present in *Theologia*." Ibid., 39.

between Tauler's sermons, the *Theologia Germanica*, and Luther's theology of the cross.¹ The themes of facing up to reality and entering into the darkness, the centrality of the cross, and the certainty of *Anfechtung* are themes prominent in Luther. However, what distinguishes Luther's thought from that of these mystics is still to be found in his Christology and soteriology.² It is perhaps ironic that this is also, as we shall see, one of the major differences between Luther and contemporary contextual and political theologies. Perhaps Henri Strohl sums it up accurately by saying that Luther may have been a friend of Tauler and the author of the *Theologia Germanica*, but he was not their disciple.³

¹ This is in direct contrast to von Loewenich's early view. While he admits that there are certain similar themes between them, he concludes that "the distinctiveness of Luther's theology of the cross can be derived from the German Theology as little as from the theology of Tauler." von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 163, 206 n. 251). While von Loewenich argues that German mysticism was ultimately a theology of glory (*Ibid.*, 155-6), he appears more accepting of Tauler in later writings, as previously noted.

² Both von Loewenich and McGrath note, for example, that Luther's theology of the cross is greatly influenced by the theme of justification by grace. Thus, Christology and soteriology are central to it. But the theology of the cross is also an epistemology. What von Loewenich and McGrath overlook, however, is the influence the mystics have in the epistemological development of the theology of the cross. Von Loewenich overlooks this by not differentiating between the types of mystics, while McGrath overlooks it by focusing on the scholastic influences upon the theology of the cross.

On the other hand, those who focus on the methodological similarities between mysticism and the theology of the cross, but do not take the Christological and soteriological emphases of Luther into account, overlook differences which make Luther's theology of the cross much more than a recapitulation of mystical theology. Thus, Lage's statement that "Where Luther differs with the theology of the cross of penitential mysticism is more a matter of degree than of theological substance," reveals a failure to understand Luther's Christology and his focus on the Incarnation. Lage, *Luther's Christology*, 63.

³ Henri Strohl, *Luther Jusqu'en 1520*, 2nd ed. *Études d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses*, no. 55 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), 193ff. Even though Strohl makes the argument that Luther was not a "disciple" of Tauler or the German Theology, it must be remembered that Luther states in his preface to this work that, along with the Bible and St. Augustine, the *Theologia Germanica* has been one of his best teachers of theology (LW 31: 75; WA 1: 378-9). In one sense, then, he considered himself a "disciple" of Tauler and the German Theology. Cf. Rix, *Martin Luther: The Man and the Image*, 33-34.

3. **Johannes von Staupitz.** A basic theme that Staupitz (1468-1524) shared with Luther was Christology. Christ on the cross provides a model to follow in becoming conformed to him.¹ By pointing to Christ's suffering, Staupitz laid some of the groundwork for a theology of the cross. As Rupp comments,

That Staupitz directed him toward the "wounds of Jesus" meant that Luther was turned towards the most tender theme of medieval devotion, and along the road which would lead to his own "Theology of the Cross."²

Merely meditating on the cross of Christ, however, was not enough for Staupitz. It must become the centre of a Christian's life, just as it is central to the life of Christ.³ Consequently, the theme of *Anfechtung* plays an important role in Staupitz. Oberman, for example, recognizes this when he succinctly states,

Staupitz did not help the frightened monk by simply giving him the first confessional counsel that came to his mind; he spoke out of the fullness of experience. *The theology of temptation was his specialty.*⁴ [emphasis added]

In his *Anfechtung* theology, Staupitz also made use of the *descensus ad infernum* and the *theologia negativa* to counsel Luther. These themes were popular in German mysticism.⁵

¹ Johannes von Staupitz, *Johannes Stapitii Opera*, I. Knaake, ed., (Potsdam: A. Krausnick, 1867), 62.

² Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1953), 119. Quite possibly it would have been Staupitz who directed Luther towards *The Imitation of Christ*, and its "way of the cross" (*via crucis*), in his role as Vicar-General of the Augustinian order (if Luther had not already been familiar with it!). Note also the parallels between Staupitz and Bernard of Clairvaux in their emphasis on the wounds of Christ.

³ Lage, *Luther's Christology*, 49.

⁴ Oberman, *Luther*, 182.

⁵ Paul Althaus calls this *descensus ad infernum* a "resignation to damnation," which should not be confused with the *resignatio voluntatis*, even though they are connected in many respects. Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, Robert C. Schultz, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 286. See also Ernest Wolf, *Staupitz und Luther* (Leipzig: Heinsius, 1927), 107 ff.

Staupitz did not lightly dismiss the struggles of Luther. Rather, his advice was simple and consistent: Luther needed to face his struggles directly. He counselled Luther to head straight into the darkness, relying only on Scripture, and thus on God's promises. Staupitz took the themes of *descensus ad infernum* and *theologia negativa*, which were integral in his *Anfechtung* theology, and made it central to his counselling of Luther.

Steinmetz also notes that Luther and Staupitz both made use of the theme of a "joyous exchange", which is traceable back to Augustine's *commercium admirabile*.¹ Even though Augustine (and Staupitz) used this term in reference to the exchange of life and death, while Luther expanded it to include an exchange of sin and righteousness, the methodology is the same. Furthermore, Staupitz's test of the verifiability of any doctrine, namely, whether it gave glory to God or to humanity, seems to be a basis for much of Luther's theology.² It is evident in his critiques of works righteousness,³ and it is also in the background of his definition of what it means to be human.⁴

Staupitz, unlike Gerson, is careful to separate one's union with Christ from an ecstatic experience. They are not necessarily the same. As Steinmetz argues, "Union with Christ is for

¹ Steinmetz, Luther and Staupitz, 29.

² *Ibid.*, 33-4.

³ Luther felt that it was Staupitz who taught him to trust in God's gifts to humanity rather than focusing on human gifts to God. Moreover, both Luther and Staupitz felt that humility was not a human merit prior to justification. Steinmetz, Luther and Staupitz, 93-5.

⁴ For example, Luther admonishes that "we are to be human and not God" WABr 5: 415.41-6; LW 49: 337 (Letter of June 30, 1530). This reflects a recognition by Luther that any attempt by humans to reject their humanness reveals a desire to bask in the glory reserved for God, and to be the focus of attention rather than God. This "test" of Staupitz's is also reflected in Luther's comments on the Commandments in his Catechisms, especially in his comments about the First Commandment.

Staupitz only another way of talking about justification."¹ Here Staupitz and Luther are in close agreement. This union with Christ is obtained by Christ's works "for us," rather than some mystical experience.

Of all the German mystics, it seems that Luther and Staupitz have the most in common. Some of this is no doubt due to the relationship between the two. Luther was influenced by the theology of Staupitz; but not so much through his teaching as through pastoral conversation and in the confessional.² Experience and theology were intimately connected. His wise counsel to Luther provided a very practical methodological model for Luther's "down-to-earth" theology of the cross.

Despite the similarities between Staupitz and Luther, it is difficult, perhaps even impossible to identify which themes in Luther's *theologia crucis* are directly traceable to Staupitz, and which ones originate with his own study of other theologians and the scriptures, or even with his own reflections on certain experiences in his life. Attempts to answer this question are further complicated by the fact that scholars are still divided on what Staupitz's theological position was, and whether or not he could even be classified as a "mystic."³ In the final analysis, all that can be safely said is that Staupitz appears to have influenced Luther's development of the theology

¹ Steinmetz, Luther and Staupitz, 132.

² Luther at one point says, ". . . my good Staupitz said, 'One must keep one's eyes fixed on that man who is called Christ.' Staupitz is the one who started the teaching [of the gospel in our time]." LW 54: 97; WATr 2: no. 526 (Spring, 1533). Cf. Steinmetz, Luther and Staupitz, 3. On the other hand, Staupitz, in his final letter to Luther, refers to himself as *discipulus tuus*. McGrath, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 39. This letter by Staupitz is found in T. Kolde, Die deutsche Augustiner-Congregation und Johannes von Staupitz (Gotha: F. A. Perthes, 1879), 446-7.

³ Lohse, Martin Luther, 28. McGrath outlines some of the reasons for the difficulties in determining Staupitz's theology. McGrath, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 38-9.

of the cross, but that this influence was transmitted primarily through the pastoral, rather than academic setting.¹

4. Summary. After surveying some of the more prominent mystics which Luther encountered in his studies, there are some conclusions that can be drawn. Luther does accept many of the themes common to the Christian mystics. He adopts the themes of the *descensus ad infernum*, the *resignatio* of the mind and the will, the hiddenness of God, the criticisms raised over the *potentia Dei absoluta et ordinata*, and the German mystic's focus on the humanity of Christ rather than on speculation. He accepts and even enlarges on some of their common critiques of scholasticism (and more specifically, speculative theology), and abuses within the church.² But one cannot conclude from this, as Lage does, that the *theologia crucis* of Luther was derived from the penitential affective mysticism of Staupitz and Stapulensis.³ To draw such conclusions overlooks some crucial differences, differences which have radical consequences. Lienhard, for example, suggests some major differences, which must be noted.⁴

First, Lienhard argues that the mystical theology that Luther encountered focused more on the imitation of the man Jesus than on the Christ of dogma. As he notes, "Luther goes far beyond the piety and theology of the imitation of Jesus. He returns to the theology of the

¹ As Steinmetz, among others, argues in his work Luther and Staupitz, 141-44.

² Yet for Luther, criticising abuses in the church was not his primary concern. Rather, he was concerned with theological issues. In this sense he differed from many of the earlier reforming movements, who concentrated primarily on reforms of church practice and morals.

³ Lage, Luther's Christology, 76.

⁴ While these differences are valid, one must be careful to not make too much of them. Lienhard, like von Loewenich, does not always distinguish clearly enough between the various forms of mysticism.

incarnation of the early church."¹ In the mystics the theological implications of the Incarnation are generally overlooked.² Instead, the imitation of Jesus is a central focus. Even the focus on the suffering of Christ is interpreted differently by Luther. As Lienhard states,

Even those who, like Gerson and Tauler, for example, paid great attention to the temptations (*Anfechtung*) to which human beings are exposed, have not dared to attribute them to Christ. . . . Luther, on the contrary, envisages in a radical fashion the feeling of abandonment and damnation in the consciousness of Jesus Christ.³

¹ Lienhard argues that it is the Christ of dogma that is the basis of Luther's Christology. Lienhard, *Luther*, 36. See also Erich Seeberg, *Luthers Theologie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969), 14.

² Three examples might shed light on what is meant here. First, little is said by the mystics about the Incarnation as a self-revelation of God, in the way that God wants to be known. Second, the majority of mystics also ascribed to a theology of ascent--of our ascending into heaven in order to be united with God--rather than to an Incarnational theology which stresses that this union with God occurs when God "comes down the ladder from heaven" to dwell with us on this earth. Third, as Luther understood it, an Incarnational theology is much better suited to affirm a theology of creation, for it indicates that this world is a place where God has actually chosen to dwell.

³ Lienhard, *Luther*, 116. Cf. 25. Althaus also supports this view: "Luther's doctrine of the cross transcends all earlier theology through the radical seriousness with which he allows Christ to suffer both hell and being totally forsaken by God. In his understanding of the atonement and of the cross, he cannot involve Christ deeply enough in our humanity." Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 208. Althaus overstates the case, however, in suggesting that Luther is the first theologian to deal with the radical seriousness of the cross. Tertullian, for example, is willing to go so far as to talk about a "crucified God" (*Deus crucifixus*) in his treatise "On the Flesh of Christ," chapter 5, paragraph 1. *The Christological Controversy*, Richard A. Norris, trans. and ed., Sources of Early Christian Thought, William G. Rausch, series ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 69, much before Luther used the term in 1518 in his Explanations of the Ninety Five Thesis (LW 31: 225). Furthermore, as Pelikan notes, "the Sancus or Trisagion was revised in the liturgy of Antioch to read: 'Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, thou who wast crucified for us, have mercy on us'." Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, 270. Moltmann and Sobrino are contemporary theologians who argue along similar lines.

Furthermore, it was the theologians who wrote the passion story in Matthew (esp. 27:46) and the accounts in Galatians 3:13 and Psalm 22 which portray the radical seriousness of what the cross implies for both God and humanity. Luther reflects, rather than transcends this theme.

Second, Lienhard argues that Luther deviates from the mystics in stressing that Christ the sacrament precedes Christ the example.¹ While Luther did not reject the idea of an *imitatio Christi*, he insisted that the *imitatio* must not be the basis for justification. How one lives in the presence of God (*coram Deo*) and humans (*coram hominibus*) is important, but it must not be the *basis* on which one is justified or *enters* into God's presence.² Failing to make this distinction can lead to thinking that union with God (i.e. justification) is dependent on how perfectly we imitate Christ.

It becomes clear, therefore, that Luther was confronted with two dangers in his development of a theology of the cross: a speculative form of mysticism which overlooked the Incarnation, and a late medieval piety which focused on the imitation of Christ to the detriment of Christ as sacrament.³ There are, of course, many more differences and similarities between Luther and the mystics which have not been delineated here.⁴ Yet even when they share

¹ Lienhard, Luther, 36. See also, Iserloh, "Luther's Christ-Mysticism," 39-41. This should not be taken to mean that the mystics such as Tauler and the author of the *Theologia Germanica* understood Christ only in terms of *exemplum* with regard to the "*imitatio Christi*." Cf. Hägglund, Background of Luther's Doctrine of Justification, 15; Wilhelm Preger, Geschichte der deutsche Mystik im Mittelalter (Osnabruck: Zeller, 1962), vol. 3, 184ff.

² See here Lage, Luther's Christology, 20-21. The fear of an incipient works righteousness in any *imitatio Christi* leads Ebeling, among others, to stress that mysticism has nothing in common with justification, and therefore, the theology of the cross. Ebeling, Luther: An Introduction to his Thought, R.A. Wilson, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 226ff; and Hoffman, Luther and the Mystics, 82-4.

³ These two "fronts" are noted by Iserloh, "Luther's Christ-Mysticism," 40-41.

⁴ In his earlier writings, von Loewenich is quick to identify and stress what he considers as differences. He suggests that the theology of the cross is a theology of revelation, unlike mysticism, and that they have a radically different anthropology as well. Using the mysticism of Tauler as an example, he concludes by saying, "The very core of Tauler's mystical theology must remain incomprehensible to the theology of the cross, for it is manifestly a theology of glory." von Loewenich, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 155-6. As noted previously, however,
(continued...)

common themes, Luther often adapts them by adding to them or limiting them, so that when they re-emerge as themes in his *theologia crucis*, they have his own stamp on them. On the other hand, it is clear that Luther did not develop his theology of the cross from a void. He was conversant with and aware of many traditions within mysticism, which provided him with the impetus for--if not the actual content of--many of the themes which appear later in his theology of the cross.

V. LATE MEDIEVAL SCHOLASTIC ANTECEDENTS

The relationship between late scholastic theology and Luther has been the focus of most studies dealing with sources of Luther's thought. Opinions of this relationship cover a broad spectrum. Rix (reflecting Denifle's anti-protestant rhetoric that Luther was ignorant of scholastic theology), boldly remarks that Luther had very little in common with the scholastics--the only genuine theologians.¹ Others, such as Lortz, argue that Luther knew well the scholastic theology of Ockham, as interpreted by Biel, but that this theology was not reflective of true catholic theology.² On the other extreme is the popular protestant mythology that arose out of the anti-

⁴(...continued)

von Loewenich withdraws some of his criticisms of Tauler in later writings. Furthermore, from Luther's own writings, and his high regard for Tauler at the very time he was sketching out his theology of the cross, one would have to suggest that there are many similarities between Tauler's mystical theology and Luther's theology of the cross.

¹ Rix, Luther: the Man and the Image, 204.

² Joseph Lortz, The Reformation in Germany, Vol. I, 195ff. See also his introduction to Erwin Iserloh, Gnade und Eucharistie in der philosophischen Theologie des Wilhelm von
(continued...)

catholic rhetoric of the preceding centuries, which argued that Luther totally rejected scholastic theology in all its forms. In the process, the significant positive aspects of the relationship between Luther and the scholastics have been overshadowed. It must be stressed from the outset that Luther did not reject everything connected with scholasticism.

There were two main forms of scholasticism in Luther's day; the *via antiqua*, which followed the teachings of Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus (followed by the Dominicans and Franciscans, respectively), and the *via moderna*, which can be traced to William of Ockham.¹ According to Lage, the *via antiqua* tradition argued that the good was universal in nature, it was revealed to humanity through natural law, and discernable by human reason.² The *via moderna* rejected this approach. Ockham instead argued that the good could be arbitrary, according to whatever God ordains as good. God's freedom cannot be overshadowed by universals which could limit God.³

Luther was instructed by Jodocus Trutvetter and Bartholomäus Arnoldi of Usingen in the *via moderna* (as modified by Biel) while a student in the Faculty of Arts at Erfurt, and it was also

²(...continued)

Ockham, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte, Mainz, Vol. 8, (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1956); von Loewenich, Luther, 79ff; Hägglund, The Background of Luther's Doctrine of Justification, 16ff.

¹ It is well to remember at this point, however, that Lortz, among others, considered Ockhamism, at least in the form that Luther encountered it, as un-catholic. Any comparisons between Luther and Ockhamist theology and epistemology, therefore, only reveal the extent of the un-catholic teaching Luther was subjected to.

Yet the very development of the *via moderna* suggests that there were problems and inadequacies in the *via antiqua*, problems which other traditions sought to address.

² Lage, Luther's Christology, 11.

³ *Ibid.*, 12.

taught in the Arts Faculty at Wittenberg.¹ From these educational influences, it is no surprise that throughout his life he considered himself a *Terminista modernus*, an adherent to the *via moderna*.² What is just as significant is that, according to McGrath, Luther demonstrates little first-hand knowledge of the *via antiqua*, which partially explains Luther's apparent unfamiliarity with Thomas Aquinas.³ McGrath also argues that Luther's unfamiliarity with Thomism

¹ For a brief history, see McGrath, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 29-32. The Arts Faculty at the University of Wittenberg taught this modern way (largely due to Trutvetter, who came to Wittenberg in 1507, and was immediately made Rector).

² WATr 5: 6419. McGrath argues that "Luther appears to have remained an adherent of the *via moderna* throughout his life." McGrath, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 36. See also the careful distinction McGrath rightly makes between nominalism and the *via moderna*, as well as the fact that while Luther considered himself a "terminist" throughout his life, this only referred to the epistemology, but not the theology of the *via moderna*. Idem, Iustitia Dei, 166ff.

³ McGrath, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 177. Denifle argues that Luther was only familiar with the "unsound" theology of late Medieval scholasticism transmitted through Biel and others. Heinrich Denifle, Luther und Luthertum in der erste Entwicklung 2 volumes. 2nd ed. (Mainz: Kirchheim, 1906), vol. I, 2 pp. 535-6. Lortz suggests that "the sound Catholic theology of the *doctor gratiae*, St. Thomas Aquinas, [was] little known by Luther." Lortz, The Reformation in Germany, vol 1, 193. See also Pesch, who suggests that Thomas Aquinas is not even an "underground source" for Luther's thought. Pesch, "Existential and Sapiential Theology," 61-2. It further supports the argument that Luther was trained in the *via moderna*.

Denis Janz, however, suggests that Denifle's view overlooked the fact that there were Thomists on the Arts Faculty at both Erfurt and Wittenberg, while Lortz's view is "ahistorical": Janz, Luther and Late Medieval Thomism: A Study in Theological Anthropology (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983), 5-8. That followers of the *via antiqua* were on faculty at Erfurt, see Friedrich Benary, Zur Geschichte der Stadt und der Universität Erfurt am Ausgang des Mittelalters, Vol. III (Gotha: F.A. Perthes, 1919), 34-55. Farthing suggests that Biel was generally accurate in his understanding of Thomas Aquinas' theology, except in some areas, such as justification. John L. Farthing, Thomas Aquinas and Gabriel Biel: Interpretations of St. Thomas Aquinas in German Nominalism on the Eve of the Reformation (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1988). However, Janz has shown that Cajetan, a Thomist, also did not correctly portray Thomas' views on justification. Janz, Luther and Late Medieval Thomism, 123-57. Cf. McGrath, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 72-3. A good treatment of the relationship between Luther and Thomas Aquinas is found in Janz, Luther on Thomas Aquinas: the Angelic Doctor in the Thought of the Reformer, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz, Bd. 140 (Stuttgart: R. Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1989). See (continued...)

affected, to some degree, the problems he had regarding what he had been taught about justification.¹

The process of determining scholastic influences upon Luther's theology of the cross is very complex. Nevertheless, there are some themes which must be explored in order to better understand the relationship of the theology of the cross to scholasticism.

The central focus of Luther's sources have revolved around the teaching of justification, and it also plays a crucial role in understanding the theology of the cross. McGrath rightly states,

Luther's discovery of the righteousness of God is but one step in the process leading to the theology of the cross—but it is nevertheless the decisive catalytic step, which forced Luther to reconsider the theological matrix within which this concept was set.²

While the theological implications of the scholastics' teachings on justification are important for an understanding of Luther's development of the theology of the cross, both in his

²(...continued)

also Ozment, "*Homo Viator: Luther and Late Medieval Theology*," *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective*, Steven E. Ozment, ed. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 142-154, and Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, 3rd ed. (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1983).

¹ See here McGrath's summary in *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 100ff. Another factor regarding justification is that the church was vague in many respects regarding its teaching on justification. Since the Council of Carthage (418), no other council convened to discuss justification until the Council of Trent (1545ff), other than the Second Council of Orange (529ff). While Orange II dealt with justification, and made some very important clarifications, this council appeared to be not very well known. McGrath states that part of the problem was that Orange II was somewhat local in nature. Furthermore—or perhaps as a result of this—there does not seem to be any awareness of or mention of this council in the writings of medieval theologians, even though the Pope at the time of Orange II had given it his approval. *Ibid.*, 11ff.

² McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 99. Later in the same work he argues that "an analysis of the nature of Luther's insights concerning the true nature of *iustitia Dei* shows that, in every respect, the *theologia crucis* is foreshadowed. In other words, Luther's theological breakthrough—which we date in 1515—contains within itself the germs of the theology of the cross." *Ibid.*, 178.

rejection of certain themes and his modifications of others, it is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate this theme.¹ Some of the most important themes will be discussed in the next chapter, when the focus will be on what exactly Luther's theology of the cross is. Rather, at this point, it would be worthwhile to look at some of the methodological themes which Luther adapts from his scholastic training, as well as other, less recognized aspects of scholastic theology which he draws upon.

When Luther states that he was a "terminist," or a follower of the *via moderna* even in his later life, it should be emphasized that this was correct methodologically, not theologically. He accepted Ockham's argument that God cannot be trapped by universals, in reaction to the *via antiqua*, and that God could freely choose the nature of God because of his *potentia absoluta*.²

¹ Suffice it to say that the debate over Luther's relationship to the scholastics with regard to justification is still very much at the centre of Luther research today. The complexity of the issue is perhaps best reflected in the following short sample of writings on this topic: Heiko Oberman, The Harvest of Medieval Theology; Idem, ed., Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981); in opposition to some of his thoughts regarding the Pelagianism of Biel's justification theology, see Alister E. McGrath, Luther's Theology of the Cross, pp. 53-148; Idem, Iustitia Dei. Other works to consult in this area are: H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy and Joseph A. Burgess, eds., Justification by Faith. Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985); Bengt Hägglund, The Background of Luther's Doctrine of Justification; Harry J. McSorley, "Thomas Aquinas, John Pupper von Goch, and Martin Luther: An Essay in Ecumenical Theology," Our Common Heritage as Christians: Essays in Honor of Albert C. Outler, John Deschner, Leroy T. Howe, and Klaus Penzel, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 97- 129; Otto Hermann Pesch, Theologie der Rechtfertigung bei Martin Luther und Thomas von Aquin: Versuch eines systematisch-theologischen Dialogs (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985); John H. P. Reumann, Righteousness in the New Testament: Justification in the United States Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogues (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; New York: Paulist Press, 1982); Gordon Rupp, The Righteousness of God (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953); and Philip S. Watson, Let God be God!: An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948).

² Luther was concerned here with stressing God's freedom, not the capriciousness of God, which Lortz identifies as the result of this emphasis on the absolute power of God. Lortz, The Reformation in Germany, vol. 1, 195-7.

Further, with Ockham, Luther argued that "the term *humanitas* does not refer to a 'common humanity which exists in all men' (the realist position), but to all men *individually* (the terminist position)."¹ Second, Luther also agreed with Ockham that all concepts not absolutely necessary or not properly grounded in experience must be rejected as speculative.² This idea is reflected in his critiques of scholastic theology, although he drastically alters the argument with his focus on the Incarnation as the chosen revelation of God. In other words, Luther takes this theme of Ockham and uses it as a principle for understanding revelation.

A third methodological similarity Luther has with the *via moderna* concerns the relationship between the ecclesial and political powers. Whereas the *via antiqua* had advocated the subordination of the worldly order to that of the church, the *via moderna* generally called for a co-ordination of the two. The conciliar movements of the 15th century reflect this approach of the *via moderna* in many respects.³ For Luther, this theme is reflected in the establishment of territorial churches,⁴ and to some extent in his critiques of the abuses of power in the papacy.

¹ McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 36. See also Lage, *Luther's Christology*, 12. One should be careful, however, to not assume that Ockham and Luther had similar anthropologies: Luther rejects the implications of Ockham (which Biel tries to tone down) regarding the free will of humans. Cf. Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 79; Theodore Süß, *Luther* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969), 68ff.

² This concept is often referred to as Ockham's razor. See Ockham, *Summa Totius Logicae*, in *Ockham: Philosophical Writings*, P. Boehner ed. and trans. (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1957), 92-95. Cf. Lage, *Luther's Christology*, 12ff. Oberman argues that Trutvetter and Arnoldi, Luther's teachers at Erfurt, stressed this principle again and again. Oberman, *Luther*, 118.

³ For a succinct discussion about the conciliar movement and Ockham's contribution to it, see Brian Tierney, *Ockham, The Conciliar Theory, and the Canonists*, Facet Books Historical Series (Medieval) - 19, Heiko A. Oberman, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

⁴ von Loewenich, *Luther*, 231.

Fourth, Luther also seems to have learned from both the scholasticism of Ockhamism and the *via antiqua* something about the dialectic between faith and reason. Luther did not reject reason; rather he argued that it has its place; but in matters of confronting the mysteries of God and the hiddenness of God, it must give way to faith.¹

A fifth theme common to both Ockhamist methodology and Luther was their reaction to the attempts to harmonize theology and do away with any contradictions. The *via moderna*, on the other hand, juxtaposed antithetical or seemingly contradictory statements.² For Luther, this methodological approach is reflected in his many uses of *simul*, and also in his development of the hidden and revealed God.

Through a comparison of Luther and Ockhamism, it becomes clear that Luther adapted many aspects of the methodology inherent in the *via moderna*. Furthermore, it also becomes

¹ See here Ockham, *Summa Totius Logicae*; See also von Loewenich, *Luther*, 49; Lage, *Luther's Christology*, 14. For a more detailed study of the relationship between faith and reason in Luther, see Brian Gerrish, *Grace and Reason: A Study in Luther's Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 10-27; and Bernhard Lohse, *Ratio et Fides. Eine Untersuchung über die ratio in der Theologie Luthers* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958).

² For a brief treatment of this theme, see Lage, *Luther's Christology*, 164f. This *simul* approach is also discussed regarding "faith" in Gründler, "Devotio Moderna," 190-91.

Lortz notes the creative potential for theology in this approach, suggesting that it breathes new life into forms that are often too rigid: "[Luther] loved the paradox--more than this, it was the life's blood of his theology. There is nothing astonishing about this statement: it touches the foundation of Luther's disposition. His love of paradox is not an overflow from an accidental mood, not even simply his basic mental and spiritual attitude. It is part and parcel of the very core of his theology, of his *theologia crucis*, i.e. of a theology in which contradiction itself appears as the very sign of truth. The accursed criminal on the gallows, forsaken by God, is the Son of God." Lortz, *The Reformation in Germany*, Vol. 1, 173.

clear that Luther's criticism of Ockhamism was primarily over theological content-- and not method.¹

In terms of Christology, as with soteriology, Luther's theology is often to be understood as a reaction against both "ways" of scholastic theology. He emphasized the Incarnation and cross of Christ, themes which were sometimes obscured in some representations of medieval theology. In reaction to Biel's emphasis on the *exemplum* of Christ,² for example, Luther stresses the priority of Christ as *sacramentum*.³ This allows him to move away from the debate

¹ von Loewenich, Luther, 49. It is what he *perceives* as Pelagianism, and the minimal importance placed on the Incarnation which Luther reacts to, as well as the Aristotelian presuppositions in Ockham--and others! Some of the basic epistemological and methodological tenets of the *via moderna* are reflected in Luther. Gerrish suggests that "Luther finds himself attacking reason in characteristic Nominalist style precisely in order to destroy the other characteristic of Nominalist thought, its optimism concerning the powers of the human will." Gerrish, Grace and Reason, 56. In other words, Luther accepts the nominalist skepticism, present in its methodology, but rejects its theological optimism in regard to the will. *Ibid.*, 55.

² Biel, as others, felt that the repetition of good works based on the imitation of Christ, which would develop into a habitual way of life, would prepare a person for the reception of grace. This led to a focus on Christ as example rather than as one who was made Incarnate and died "for us." Further, when Biel does discuss the notion of Christ as sacrament, it is generally done in the context of original sin. Christ's death, therefore, removes basically only the effects of original sin. Luther felt that this approach overlooks the seriousness of sin. See here Lage, Luther's Christology, 20-21, 33.

³ Luther does not reject the idea of *exemplum*, however, as Pinomaa and others seem to suggest. Pinomaa writes, "Gradually the alternatives became clear to him: either *Christus exemplum* (Christ the example) or *Christus sacramentum* (Christ as the sacrifice for us)." Lennart Pinomaa, Faith Victorious: An Introduction to Luther's Theology, Walter J. Kukkonen, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 48. Gustaf Wingren also reflects this approach: "Christ is not to be imitated by us, but rather to be accepted in faith." Wingren, The Christian's Calling: Luther on Vocation, C. Rasmussen, trans. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 172. However, precisely because Christ is accepted in faith, one wants to respond, out of love, by imitating Christ--not out of an attempt at works righteousness, but as a response of thankfulness to God for this act of grace and mercy! It is not a matter of either/or. Luther does affirm the imitation of Christ in his Romans Commentary of 1515-16: "we should not accept what is written about Christ in a speculative way, but as an example for us." WA 56: 137; LW 25: 120; cf. other examples on the same page. Luther only rejects the imitation of Christ if it is used as a
(continued...)

over the *synteresis* and into a new area of discussion, regarding justification from the perspective of what Christ does *extra nos* rather than how God acts within us. Yet Luther does not give up the idea of "Christ in us," for that would leave him open to the criticism that he was not concerned with sanctification and regeneration. This shift also signifies movement toward a more Christocentric position. This renewed emphasis on Christology, or more specifically, on certain aspects of Christology, is a distinguishing characteristic of Luther, and it sets him apart from many scholastics. On the other hand, there are certain Christological themes to be found in scholastic theology which Luther appears to overlook. Congar, for example, argues that Luther left to one side or deliberately discarded certain developments of Scholastic theology in matters concerning Christology.¹

It should be remembered that many of the criticisms Luther has about scholasticism are common to the general discontent of the era. Many considered scholasticism to be an exercise of only the elite, and that theology had been overtaken by philosophical speculation.² The mystics had criticized scholasticism for years. Even among scholastics, followers of the various "ways" were critical of each other. What was different with Luther was his unique blending of Scripture, Augustine's teachings, and mysticism in the development of his criticism of scholasticism.

³(...continued)

way to earn salvation, suggesting that such an approach "perverts" the example of Christ and of the saints. WA 56: 276; LW 25: 263-4 (1515-1516 Romans Commentary).

¹ Yves Congar, "Considerations and Reflections on the Christology of Luther," Dialogue Between Christians: Catholic Contributions to Ecumenism, Philip Loretz, trans. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), 405.

² For example, Lage, Luther's Christology, 76. Lage overstates the case, however, when he argues that the theology of glory/theology of the cross distinction is simply another instance of a mystical theology critique of scholasticism. *Ibid.*, 73, n. 65.

VI. CONCLUSION

The question again is raised: Is there anything new in Luther's theology of the cross, any themes which others had not already discussed in their theology? Both theological and methodological themes which play a prominent role in the *theologia crucis* of Luther are found in other authors as well. The scriptural themes that show up in Luther are to be expected. Yet the possible influence of the mystics upon Luther and the methodological themes borrowed from certain branches of scholasticism are still debated by scholars. While it is fairly easy to identify common themes in Luther and the mystics, what is not clear is whether Luther borrowed those themes directly from the various mystics, or whether he modified them to such an extent that they no longer meant the same thing.

The hiddenness of God, the resignation of the will (and mind), the descent into hell, humility, *Anfechtung*, are not themes unique to Luther. Nor is the call to face up to reality, or the emphasis on the Incarnation and the suffering of Christ. Some of these themes even existed in popular forms of piety in Luther's day; e.g. in the passion plays and in the development of the stations of the cross. The "dialectical" method (or paradoxes), which fuels Luther's ideas of *simul*, is also not unique to him. It was an epistemological theme in the *via moderna*. The dual emphasis on Christ as example and Christ as the one who acts "for us" appears earlier in Augustine. Even Luther's emphasis on justification, which forms a very fundamental tenet of the theology of the cross, is not completely unique to him. It had a scriptural basis, it is given further impetus by Augustine, and it has a precedent in the Second Council of Orange as well as in the mature work of Thomas Aquinas.¹

¹ McSorley, "Thomas Aquinas, John Pupper von Goch, and Martin Luther," 108ff.

While all these similarities in themes may suggest that Luther was merely reflecting the themes common to the theological milieu of his time, or that he was really nothing more than a compiler of themes borrowed from others, such a conclusion would be much too simplistic. Yes, Luther did borrow many themes from many diverse sources: if he had not done so, his biblical and theological scholarship would be questionable, indicating an abysmal lack of theological knowledge and research. Instead, all these common themes reveal that Luther was involved in a scholarly endeavour. While certain omissions (such as his apparent lack of familiarity with some of the mature thinking and exegesis of Thomas Aquinas), are unfortunate, they do not mean that Luther was an ignorant or lazy theologian who was simply unaware of the theological tradition. Rather, his "borrowing" of themes from a wide variety of sources indicates a person who was grounded in--or aware of--much of the Christian tradition available to him. It also is a strong argument against anyone who would suggest that the church had only "one" theology or theological tradition.

In this chapter, there has also been a conscious use of the word "theme" in discussing ideas and concepts which are similar in Luther and his theological sources. This has been deliberate, since the word "theme" does not suggest identical usage, but rather a similarity. "Themes," as used here, refers to basic similar ideas, while allowing for the possibility of modifications and adaptations, and at times, even new meanings attached to them. In fact, it is the work of theology to take the themes of Scripture as they have--at times, have not!--been appropriated by the Church's creeds, confessions, and liturgical texts, and by theologians in various ages and places, and to adapt them in such a way as to speak the same basic truths of faith to each generation. No variations in themes, or no new developments around similar themes, indicates a lack of thinking out the faith. Thus, while Luther borrowed and adapted

many themes found in theologians before him, he modified and changed them, so that at times the end result was quite different from his predecessors, even if they both could be loosely categorized under the same "theme."

One must conclude, therefore, that there are many antecedents and similar themes to which Luther had access, and which he developed and reworked in new ways into his own unique theology of the cross. It was not a theology that was developed in isolation. That would have been contrary to his emphasis on scripture, his emphasis on the Incarnation, the cross, and experience, and his high esteem for Augustine and certain other biblical commentators and theologians. How influential the antecedents and similarities from these "sources" were to Luther, however, is impossible to discern with any degree of certainty. Perhaps Joseph Lortz summarizes it as well as anyone when he concludes:

Martin Luther expressed very few views to which we do not find parallels in earlier theologians and reformers. None the less Luther is something new--an original phenomenon of creative quality and power."¹

This certainly applies to Luther's theology of the cross.

¹ Lortz, The Reformation in Germany, Vol. 1, 167. See also Gordon Rupp, Luther's Progress to the Diet of Worms, 37.

CHAPTER TWO

LUTHER'S THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

I. INTRODUCTION

Luther's theology of the cross is an enigmatic entity. Most Luther scholars mention his theology of the cross as one of the important themes in his theology, but having done so, promptly go on to discussing other themes. As a result, very few books have been written about his theology of the cross. If the *theologia crucis* is so important to Luther, however, then one must question why more has not been written about it. At least three reasons for the wariness surrounding his theology of the cross emerge. First, what Luther means by a theology of the cross is not clearly delineated in his writings, unlike his writings on justification. Because of the relatively few references to the theology of the cross *per se*, it is not always easily recognized in his writings. Furthermore, the content and the methodology inherent in the theology of the cross is not always distinguished or even recognized. Second, there is a question about how long the theology of the cross remained a theme in Luther's theology. Some scholars, for example, have attributed the *theologia crucis* to his "monkish" and "pre-reformation" theology,¹ while others would argue that he abandoned the theology of the cross later on in life, since he never mentions it by name after 1520.² Third, a theology of the cross is not something that is

¹ For example, Otto Ritschl, Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus, Vol. II/1 (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich, 1912), 40-84.

² Luther used the term *theologia crucis* only in the very early years of the reformation. Joseph E. Verduyssen, for example, argues that Luther used the term *theologia crucis* only 5 times, and only between the years 1516 - 1520. Verduyssen, "Luther's Theology of the Cross (continued...)"

attractive to society. Therefore it is often avoided. The theology of the cross thus provides many challenges for Luther research, which have often been overlooked by the research on other themes in Luther's theology, such as justification or the law/gospel dialectic.

Is the theology of the cross central to Luther? In his Second Psalms Commentary (1519-1521), Luther provides an explicit and concise answer when he wrote, *CRUX sola est nostra theologia* (the cross alone is our theology).¹ Later he adds, *Crux probat omnia* (the cross tests everything).² In these two phrases Luther reveals that the theology of the cross is central to his theology. Among Luther scholars, McGrath states this most succinctly: "The *theologia crucis*

²(...continued)

at the time of the Heidelberg Disputation," *Gregorianum* 57 (1976), 524. Yet most scholars today would agree that the theology of the cross is a theme which runs consistently throughout Luther's life. In this regard, consult the classic work on the subject, Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, Herbert J. A. Bouman, trans. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976), 12-13.

Other significant works which emphasize the centrality of the theology of the cross in Luther throughout his career are: Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, Robert C. Schultz, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966); Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985); Regin Prenter, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, Facet Books Historical Series - 17, Charles S. Anderson, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to his Thought*, R. A. Wilson, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970); Heino O. Kadai, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," *Accents in Luther's Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), 230-272; Jerome King Del Pino, "Luther's Theology of the Cross as Reflected in Selected Historical Contexts of Social Change from 1521-15:25: A Study of the Theory and Practice in the Early Years of the Reformation," (Boston: Boston University Graduate School Dissertation, 1980); and E. Gordon Rupp, "Luther's Ninety-Five Theses and the Theology of the Cross," *Luther for an Ecumenical Age: Essays in Commemoration of the 450th Anniversary of the Reformation*, Carl S. Meyer, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), 67-81.

¹ WA 5: 176.32-3 (Psalm 5:12, Second Psalms Lectures, 1519-1521). The capitalization of *CRUX* is Luther's, apparently for emphasis.

² WA 5: 179.31 (Ibid.)

encapsulates the very essence of his 'reformation' thought."¹ Apart from it, even the emphasis on justification can become misunderstood or misused. The righteousness of God (Rom 1:17) is revealed by faith, yet Luther clearly insists that this justifying God is concealed, rather than revealed, apart from faith. The obvious revelation of God in nature, on the other hand, leaves itself open to the possibility of works righteousness.² The theology of the cross, then, provides the basic theological understanding of God which is foundational to Luther's teaching on justification. It deals with--and reveals!--the nature of the God who justifies by grace through faith.

The centrality of the theology of the cross for the doctrine of justification is also apparent in Luther's teachings on the proper and alien works of God. Only by God's alien work of "killing the sinner" is God's proper work of the justification of the sinner possible. McGrath rightly notes that, "The dialectic between the *opus alienum* and *opus proprium* has its focal point in the cross of Christ."³ Luther's approach to the alien and proper works of God also provides a firm basis for understanding the Law/Gospel dialectic. At the risk of oversimplifying things, it can be said that the theology of the cross provides the basic from which Luther's teachings of

¹ McGrath, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 178. McGrath is not alone in making this observation. von Loewenich states, for example, that "For Luther, the cross is not only the subject of theology, it is the distinctive mark of all theology. . . . the cross of Christ is significant . . . not only for the question concerning redemption and the certainty of salvation, but *it is the center that provides [the] perspective for all theological statements*. . . . There is no dogmatic topic conceivable for which the cross is not the point of reference." (Emphasis added). von Loewenich, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 17-18. See also Prenter, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 2 for a similar emphasis.

² Luther suggests this in Thesis 24 of the Heidelberg Disputation (LW 31:55; WA 1: 363.25ff). Many scholars suggest that this is Luther's first truly 'reformation theology' treatise.

³ McGrath, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 157.

justification by faith and the Law/Gospel dialectic can be understood. It is the basis for his theology. What remains to be explored in subsequent pages, however, is the theological content of Luther's theology of the cross, and whether it also provides the basis for his ethics and his attempts to apply his theology to practical issues in church and society.

The theology of the cross is an apt summary of Luther's theology. It also provides, however, a viable basis from which to address the theological implications of contemporary theologies, since it is both a Christology and a hermeneutical principle.¹ It provides a critique for both the content and the method of theological endeavour. Thus, the theology of the cross may offer a helpful approach for evaluating and reflecting on some contemporary theologies in the North American context. Before embarking on such an endeavour, however, the theology of the cross in Luther must first be carefully delineated, in terms of both its Christology (its content), and then its hermeneutic (its method). These two aspects of the theology of the cross will then form the basis for evaluating the contemporary theologies which follow.

¹ This dual aspect of the theology of the cross is recognized, among others, by von Loewenich, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 17-18, as well as by Del Pino, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," 122; Carl E. Braaten, The Apostolic Imperative (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 18-19; and Wolfhart Pannenberg, "A Theology of the Cross," Word and World 8 no. 2 (Spring 1988), 162.

II. LUTHER'S THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS AS A CHRISTOLOGY

In his important work on the Christology of Luther, Marc Lienhard argues that for Luther, "Christology is placed under the sign of the cross."¹ The cross is of central significance for Luther's Christology, for it unites the person of Christ (Christology) with his salvific work (Soteriology). Any separation of these two is dangerous.

There are three main aspects of Luther's Christology which have relevance to the theology of the cross: the theme of the hidden and revealed God; the understanding of faith which ensues from this; and Luther's understanding of atonement. These themes also play a significant factor in the development of his hermeneutical principles.

A. The Hidden and Revealed God²

The starting point in both theology and Christology for Luther was the Incarnation and cross of Christ. In the Heidelberg Disputation, Luther writes:

¹ Marc Lienhard, Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ. Stages and Themes of the Reformer's Christology, Edwin H. Robertson, trans. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1982), 136.

² The use of *deus absconditus* by Luther has come under much scrutiny, with a wide array of conclusions as to its significance and meaning. Beyond the references to the hidden God mentioned in von Loewenich and Lienhard, two other works are important in this area: John Dillenberger, God Hidden and revealed: The Interpretation of Luther's *Deus Absconditus* and Its Significance for Religious Thought (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1953), which contains a review of the various theological and historical interpretations of Luther's concept of the hidden God; and Helmut Bandt, Luthers Lehre von verborgenen Gott. Eine Untersuchung zu dem offenbarungsgeschichtlichen Ansatz seiner Theologie, *Theologische Arbeiten*, vol. 8 (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1958). See also B. A. Gerrish, "'To the Unknown God': Luther and Calvin on the Hiddenness of God," The Journal of Religion 53 (July 1973), 263-92; and Egil Grisliis, "Martin Luther's View of the Hidden God: The Problem of the *Deus Absconditus* in Luther's Treatise *De Servo Arbitrio*," McCormick Quarterly 21 (November 1967), 81-94.

Thesis 20. He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest [literally, the "backside"] things of God seen through suffering and the cross.¹

In the explanation, he adds: "Now it is not sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross."²

Two things should be noted here. First, Luther argues that God is to be known primarily through the indirect, or hidden things of God. Isaiah 45:15 is quoted to support this: "Truly thou art a God who hidest thyself."³ This is most evident at the cross. As McGrath states, "if God is revealed in the cross, he is not recognizable as God."⁴ He goes on to say,

Where the unbeliever sees nothing but the helplessness and hopelessness of an abandoned man dying upon a cross, the theologian of the cross (*theologia crucis*) recognizes the presence and activity of the "crucified and hidden God" (*Deus crucifixus et absconditus*), who is not merely present in human suffering, but actively works through it.⁵

This concept of the hidden and revealed God was crucial for Luther's context. His argument here is against those scholastics (the "theologians of glory") who based their understanding of God on assumptions about what God was like in heaven: good, powerful, wise, virtuous, and so on.⁶ In his Explanation to the Ninety-five Theses, Luther elaborates: "The theologian of glory,

¹ LW 31: 52; WA 1: 362.2-3 (Heidelberg Disputation, May, 1518).

² LW 31: 52-3; WA 1: 362.11-14 (Ibid.).

³ LW 31: 53; WA 1: 362.13-14 (Ibid.).

⁴ McGrath, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 167.

⁵ Ibid., 175.

⁶ In the Disputation Against Scholastic Theology, Luther directs such criticism primarily at Gabriel Biel and John Duns Scotus. Luther had studied their writings diligently in university. While these criticisms are more directly applicable to Biel, Luther also includes Duns Scotus in
(continued...)

however, learns from Aristotle that the object of the will is good and the good is worthy to be loved, while the evil, on the other hand, is worthy of hate. He learns that God is the highest good and exceedingly loveable."¹ Vercruysse builds upon this, leading him to state:

The *theologus gloriae* perceives in the tendency of the will a continuous progress from the good, which is loveable, towards the utmost good and loveable, God. He must constantly hate what is bad, as not leading to God. . . . So it appears that the theologian of glory, basing himself on a pagan and scholastic theology, organizes his life in an easy and unchristian way, looking in agreeable and good things for the likeness of the good and agreeable God.²

What was assumed by theologians of glory was that by developing within themselves these traits of goodness, power, wisdom, etc. (based on this image of the God in the heavens), they could assist their own salvation (*meritum de congruo*, accomplished by doing *quod in se est*). So they

⁶(...continued)

this critique. Some of the pertinent theses are:

6. It is false to state that the will can by nature conform to correct precept. This is said in opposition to Scotus and Gabriel.

10. One must concede that the will is not free to strive toward whatever is declared good. This is in opposition to Scotus and Gabriel.

13. It is absurd to conclude that erring man can love the creature above all things, therefore also God. This is in opposition to Scotus and Gabriel.

(LW 31: 9-10; WA 1: 224. Disputation Against Scholastic Theology, 1517).

The problem with this approach, Luther contends, is that even if people can know the hidden God and see this God face-to-face, they are unable to perfectly imitate these virtues of God and thus become like God. This would involve a revelation of God which requires human action to become realized, rather than a revelation of God which also reveals the action of God which makes it a human reality.

¹ LW 31: 227; WA 1: 614.17-22 (Explanations of the 95 Theses, 1518).

² Vercruysse, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," 533.

speculated about what God was like in the heavens, and then tried to earn their salvation by becoming like that heavenly God. Althaus notes,

The theology of glory seeks to know God directly in his obvious divine power, wisdom, and glory; whereas the theology of the cross paradoxically recognizes him precisely where he has hidden himself, in sufferings and in all that which the theology of glory considers to be weakness and foolishness. The theology of glory leads man to stand before God and to strike a bargain on the basis of ethical achievement in fulfilling the law, whereas the theology of the cross views man as one who has been called to suffer.¹

What is criticized here is not so much the image of God which reason reveals as the connection made between this image of God and the way in which humans are justified before God (*coram Deo*).² This approach, which Luther criticized, was labelled a "theology of glory."³ To avoid the possibility of works righteousness which arose from this, Luther argued for a totally different starting point, based not on what God is like in heaven, but rather on the clearest revelation of

¹ Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther, 27. Again, it is important to note that what is objected to is not this "knowledge" of God, but that this "knowledge" can provide the basis and means by which one is justified in the presence of God.

² As Luther states in his Church Postils (1522-1523), on the Isaiah 60:1-6 text for Epiphany: "Ask nature what is necessary to please God and to be saved, and it replies, 'Truly, you must build churches, cast bells, institute masses, observe vigils, make chalices, pyxes, images and ornaments; must burn candles, pray so long a time, fast in honour of St. Catharine, become a priest or a monk, go to Rome and to St. Jacob, wear hair shirts, torture yourself, and so on. Such are good works and true ways to salvation.' But if you ask for proof that these things are acceptable with God, reason is unable to give any other reply than that it thinks them acceptable." Lenker, 6: 320; WA 10/1/1: 532.1-3. While Luther overstates the case, it is crucial to note that the point he is making is that the problem is one of justification *coram Deo*, and that this involves an approach different from that proposed by some of the scholastic theology which he had come into contact with.

³ A theology of glory avoids the cross and the incarnation, as well as the reality of this world, which is where God has chosen to be revealed to humanity. William Hordern calls it a "theology of triumphalism." It assumes that once a person has faith, God must rescue him or her from all struggles and uncertainties, and that the individual will always triumph over evil. See Hordern, Experience and Faith: The Significance of Luther for Understanding Today's Experiential Religions (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 85-105.

what God is like on this earth. It is through the Incarnation, therefore, that God wishes to be known. As he states, "Thus you may find God in Christ, but you cannot find God outside of Christ even in heaven."¹ In Christ, God appears to be hidden from view, wrapped in weakness, foolishness and suffering.² "The blessed divinity was hidden under flesh."³

Second, the Incarnation reveals that a great inversion is needed in our thinking about what God is like and where God is to be found. It also prevents humanity from speculating about the God in heaven in ways that are not useful for them. Luther's simple advice for understanding the hidden God is thus:

For [God] did not bid you soar heavenward on your own and gape to see what God is doing in heaven with the angels. No, this is His command (Matt 7:12): "This is My beloved Son; listen to Him." There I descend to you on earth, so that you can see, hear, and touch Me. There and nowhere else is the place for those who encounter and find Me who desire Me and who would like to be delivered from their sin and saved.⁴

¹ WA 40/III: 56.10-11 (Lecture on Psalm 121, 1532-1533). Luther also writes, "Some through their speculations ascend into heaven and speculate about God the creator, etc. Do not get mixed up with this God. Whoever wishes to be saved should leave the majestic God alone--for He and the human creature are enemies. Rather grasp that God whom David {Psalm 51} also grasps. He is the God who is clothed in his promises--God as he is present in Christ. . . . This is the God you need. May you as you are yourself never be confronted by the unclothed God. . . . We know no other God than the God clothed with his promises. If he should speak to me in his majesty, I would run away--just as the Jews did. However, when he is clothed in the voice of a man and accommodates himself to our capacity to understand, I can approach him." WA 40/II: 329.8-330.7; LW 12: 312-13 (Lecture on Psalm 51, 1532).

² However, this self-revelation of God in the Incarnation is concealed to those who speculate on the God in the heavens. As Luther notes in his 1515-1516 Romans commentary, "Wisdom was made incarnate, and is thus hidden." LW 25: 223; WA 56: 237.21. It is ironic that God is hidden in that which is most visible--Jesus of Nazareth.

³ "sub carne abscondita fuit benedicta divinitas." WA 4: 82.32 (Ps. 91. First Psalms Commentary, 1513-1515).

⁴ LW 24: 65; WA 45: 520.30-35 (Commentary on John, 1537). Just prior to this passage, Luther recounts the advice given by St. Antony, the hermit: "If you see such a young saint clambering heavenward and planting one foot in heaven, pull him down posthaste, before he can (continued...)"

This becomes a common theme for Luther. The Incarnation, the Word, and the Sacraments are the "clothes" or "masks" which God wears in the act of revelation.¹ But God is hidden in the Incarnation for a purpose. In a sermon dated February 24, 1517, Luther states, "Man hides what is his in order to conceal it, but God conceals what is his in order to reveal it."² God is hidden, therefore, for two reasons. First, if we saw God's face, we would die (Exodus 33:20-23). Second, and more central for Luther, it is in the "backside of God" hidden in the Incarnation that the true nature of God is revealed.³ God wants to be known as a God-with-us, rather than a god who is distant and remote in the heavens. Moreover, it is only by God taking on our own nature that we can understand or even recognize God.⁴ This leads David

⁴(...continued)

set his other foot up there too and then plunge down head over heels." Luther comments, "This is well spoken against the fluttering spirits, who like to speculate about sublime matters, who would like to bore a hole through heaven and peek to discover what God himself is and what he does, meanwhile ignoring Christ as superfluous for that purpose." LW 24: 65; WA 45: 520.23-28 (Commentary on John, 1536). See also LW 26: 28-29; WA 40/I: 77.11-78.26 (1535 Galatians Commentary); and LW 17: 330-331; WA 31/2: 516.15-16 (Isaiah Commentary, 1527-1530).

¹ LW 24: 67; WA 45: 522.7-19 (Comments on John 14:10, 1537). See also LW 14: 114, note 9; WA 31/II: 436.10-11 (Comments on Psalm 147:13, December 1531).

² "Homo abscondit sua ut neget, Deus abscondit sua ut revelet." LW 51: 26; WA 1: 138.13-14 (Sermon of February 24, 1517). See also LW 16: 109; WA 31/II: 77.21-28 (Isaiah Commentary, 1527-1530).

³ This reference to Exodus 33 is clearly implied in Thesis 20 of the Heidelberg Disputation. Unfortunately, the American Edition of Luther's works obscures this reference by translating *posteriori Dei* as "the manifest things of God."

⁴ "Die gottlich nature ist uns zu hoch und unbegreiflich, darumb hat er uns zu gutt sich begeben inn die natur, die uns am aller befendlichsten ist, als die unser." WA 10/I/1: 356.9-11; Lenker, 6: 248 (Comments on Gal. 4:4-5, Sermon for the Sunday after Christmas, Church Postils, 1522).

Steinmetz to say, "Indeed, hiddenness, particularly hiddenness under the form of a contrary experience, is the form of God's self-revelation."¹

It must be kept in mind that for Luther, the hidden and revealed nature of God is not one of progression; of the hidden God becoming clearly revealed once a person has eyes of faith. Rather, the revealed God is simultaneously the hidden God.² The glimpses one catches of God are only of the backside of God: God's face still remains hidden from us.³ While von Loewenich suggests that Luther later comes to understand the hidden and revealed God in terms of progression, at this stage he sees them as occurring simultaneously.⁴

In stressing this hidden and revealed God dichotomy in Luther, however, one must not assume that he rejected all forms of natural revelation through reason, or that it is always

¹ David C. Steinmetz, Luther in Context (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1986), 27. Steinmetz provides a clear example of this with a passage from Luther's sermon for the First Sunday in Advent, 1533, regarding Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem: "Yea, of a truth, he will be a king, but a poor and wretched king who has in no way the appearance of a king if He is judged and esteemed by outward might and splendour, in which worldly kings and princes like to array themselves. He leaves to other kings such things as pomp, castles, palaces, gold, and wealth; and He lets them eat and drink, dress and build more daintily than other folks; but the craft which Christ the poor beggar-king knows, they do not know. He helps against not one sin only but against all my sin; and not against my sin only, but against the whole world's sin. He comes to take away not sickness only, but death; and not my death only, but the whole world's death. This, saith the Prophet, tell the daughter of Zion that she not be offended at his mean advent; but shut thine eyes and open thine ears, and perceive not how He rides there so beggarly, but hearken to what is said and preached about this poor king. His wretchedness and poverty are manifest, for He comes riding on an ass like a beggar having neither saddle nor spurs. But that he will take from us sin, strangle death, endow us with eternal holiness, eternal bliss, and eternal life, this cannot be seen. Wherefore thou must hear and believe." WA 37: 201-02. Translated by Margarethe Steiner and Percy Scott, in Day by Day we Magnify Thee (London: The Epworth Press, 1950), 1.

² Luther writes, "For the work of God must be hidden and never understood, even when it happens. But it is never hidden in any other way than under that which appears contrary to our conceptions and ideas." LW 25: 366; WA 56: 376.31 (1515-1516 Romans Commentary).

³ LW 31: 52; WA 1: 362.1-2 (Thesis 20, Heidelberg Disputation, 1518).

⁴ von Loewenich, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 40-41.

contrary to the hidden and revealed God of the Incarnation. Luther does acknowledge that the revelation of God which comes through natural knowledge—which many scholastics focused on—can be, and in fact is, useful in certain ways.¹ Natural knowledge and reason, which are derived from the obvious view of God in the heavens, cannot comprehend the God hidden and revealed in the Incarnation.² All that this natural knowledge of God can do is to recognize that God is wrathful, or what God is not.³ As Lohse argues, however, this does not mean that natural reason, based on what God is like in heaven, is some aspect of the "negative theology" which Luther accepted.⁴ Negative theology involved entering into those places where God did not appear to dwell according to human reason.

¹ Luther speaks positively about natural knowledge of God, which is available to all people, in both his 1515-1516 Romans Commentary, and in his 1535 Galatians commentary. In the earlier writing, Luther states that through this natural revelation, people "knew that the nature of divinity, or of God is that He is powerful, invisible, just, immortal, and good. They knew the invisible things of God, His eternal power and divinity." LW 25: 157; WA 56: 177.11-14. In the later work, Luther likewise asserts, "All men have a certain natural knowledge implanted in their minds (Rom. 2:14-15), by which they know naturally that one should do to others what he wants done to himself (Matt. 7:12). This principle, and others like it, which we call the law of nature, are the foundations of human law and of all good works." LW 27: 53; WA 40/II: 66.34-7. Yet this natural knowledge of God can be—and is—corrupted by sin, so that a blurred, and inaccurate image of God emerges. More importantly, however, is that such knowledge of God, while useful and necessary in this world, should not be construed as the self-revelation of God given to humanity for the purpose of salvation. It does not lead to justification *coram Deo*.

² von Loewenich, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 60-61.

³ "Reason can do this much: it can recognize God as a terrible, wrathful judge, who leaves us no place to hide, neither in this world nor in hell." WA 17/I: 431.2-4 (Sermon on the Strength and Growth of Faith and Love, October, 1525). Furthermore, he writes, "Even if natural reason in itself is not concerned with spiritual truth or divine activity, nevertheless, when it asserts affirmative statements (to use their jargon) its judgement is wrong. but when it asserts negative statements its judgement is right. Reason does not comprehend what God is, but it most certainly comprehends what God is not." LW 44: 336; WA 8: 629.24-7 (On Monastic Vows, 1521).

⁴ Bernhard Lohse, Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work, Robert C. Schultz, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 161.

Knowledge of the invisible is bound to the knowledge of the Incarnate One.¹ Gerrish summarizes the relationship between natural knowledge and the self-revelation of God when he states that natural reason can tell that "God is," (*quod sit Deus*, that is, that God exists), but it is beyond natural reason's ability to know "what God is" (*quid sit Deus*, that is, God's own nature, which is beyond the realm of natural reason).² Furthermore, what is central for Luther concerning the nature of God revealed in the Incarnation is that God saves. While natural knowledge about God can reveal that God exists, the hidden and revealed God of the Incarnation reveals God as the One who desires and acts to save. It is in the Incarnation that God is revealed as the one who has mercy and who justifies.

In Luther's writings which address social and political issues, it becomes clear that the natural knowledge of God, which comes through the laws and through reason, remains central for his thought. In his treatise *Admonition to Peace*, for example, he argues that the peasants' complaints are basically valid in terms of the natural law which God has given to all.³ Problems arise only when this natural law or knowledge is assumed to be a valid means of obtaining justification *coram Deo*.⁴ But Luther's emphasis on the hidden and revealed God of the Incarnation does not mean that natural knowledge of God is rejected. The worldly realm could not function without it.

¹ WA 3: 230.25-27; LW 10: 190 (First Psalm Commentary, 1513-1515). See also WA 3: 285.36.

² B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Reason: A Study in the Theology of Luther* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962), 15.

³ This treatise, and the relationship between "Christian law" (the Gospel) and "natural law" will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁴ As Luther succinctly states, "human reason is altogether blind *before God*." [emphasis added]. Lenker, 3: 412 (John 3: 1-15. Sermon for Trinity Sunday, 1522).

The theme of the hidden and revealed God is also reflected in his many descriptions of the alien and proper work of God (*opus alienum Dei* and *opus proprium Dei*).¹ The alien works of God are those works which appear contrary to God's nature, but which ultimately lead to a revelation of God's true nature. This dichotomy, or paradox, is also found in Luther's understanding of the Law and Gospel. While Christians are able to see God at work through the law, to non-Christians the Law appears as an alien work of God.² Christ reveals God's alien work of bringing humanity to the point where they can no longer find salvation in the God of speculation or in the god of their own good works. When this happens, then God's proper work--the revelation of God, and thus of salvation--as revealed in the incarnate Christ and as perceived by faith, is also discovered. With eyes of faith the hidden God is also the revealed God. God remains hidden only to those who insist on seeking a justifying God in the wrong things, such as Divine Majesty and in speculation, while shunning the revelation of God found in the Incarnation and the cross.

¹ With regard to the alien and proper works of God, Herbert David Rix suggests that this approach by Luther is even more irrational than having two gods: one of mercy and a one of wrath. He writes, "While it is simpler to present these views of Luther's in terms of two gods, in general his language suggests something if possible even more irrational. There are not really two gods but only one, with two different aspects: the merciful and the inscrutable--but merciless--aspect. It is the merciful aspect of this schizoid deity that Luther encounters when free of anxiety, and the inscrutable, terrifying one he struggles against during the anxiety attacks." Rix, Martin Luther: the Man and the Image (New York: Irvington Publishers, Inc., 1983), 216.

² Gerrish, Grace and Reason, 21.

B. The Understanding of Faith

McGrath pinpointed the relationship of faith to Luther's theology of the cross when he stated,

. . . the theology of the cross is thus a theology of faith, and *of faith alone*. The correlation to *Crux sola* is *sola fide*, as it is through faith, and *through faith alone*, that the true significance of the cross is perceived, and through faith alone that its power can be appropriated.¹

It is only by faith that God can be recognized in the cross and the Incarnation, hidden under weakness and suffering.

Hebrews 11:1 provides Luther with his standard definition of faith.² Faith has to do with things not seen; thus, the things of faith must be hidden. This complements his theology of the cross in two ways: first, faith cannot be gained by logical deductions or speculations of what God is like in heaven; it can only be found in the hidden God, and therefore, in Christ. Second, the view one has of God cannot be separated from faith. It is by faith that one trusts that the God hidden on the cross is also the vision of the revealed God.

There is a danger that faith defined in this way may be understood only as a *via negativa*. While it is true that Luther does talk about God dwelling in the darkness of faith,³ and in this sense appears to follow the thinking of the mystics,⁴ it is not limited to this. Rather, the theology of the cross leads us into the darkness so that our trust will be placed in God rather than

¹ McGrath, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 174. Prenter says much the same thing in his work, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 4.

² LW 33: 62; WA 18: 633.7 (The Bondage of the Will, 1525).

³ LW 21: 304; WA 7: 551.19-21 (Sermon on the Magnificat, 1521).

⁴ As von Loewenich argues, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 83. Dionysius, Tauler, Staupitz, among others, also discuss this theme of entering into the darkness, as was discussed in the previous chapter.

in our own means of salvation. It is to trust God to lead us out of the darkness into the true light, into the holy of holies.¹ Thus, the theology of the cross is both a *via negativa* and a *via positiva*.² God leads us into the darkness, not to remain hidden from our eyes, but in order to be revealed. As a result, faith has a strong eschatological element to it.³

This leads us to another central aspect of faith. For Luther, faith is centred on Christ. By faith the Christian trusts that the incarnate and crucified Christ is truly the Son of God, despite all appearances to the contrary. Thus, faith and Christ are intertwined. As Luther states: "those who approach God through faith and not at the same time through Christ actually depart from him."⁴ He then adds:

Second, the apostle is speaking against those who rely too heavily on Christ and not enough on faith, as if they were to be saved through Christ in such a way that they themselves had to do nothing or show no evidence of faith. These people have too much faith, or actually none at all. For this reason it is necessary to emphasize both points: "through faith" and "through Christ."⁵

¹ LW 21: 304; WA 7: 551.19 (Sermon on the Magnificat, 1521).

² Thus, Luther suggests that ". . . faith closes its eyes and commits the manners and the way and the method of preserving to God," so that the Christian can ". . . cling to the Word and the seeing God, *who will bring you through on to an unknown way*" [italics added]. The believer will not be left in the dark, but by trust in God will be led beyond. LW 17: 76-77; WA 31/II: 321.12-14 (Isaiah Commentary, 1527-1530).

³ WA 3: 279.30ff (Psalm 49 [50], First Psalms Commentary, 1513-1515). Faith and hope become almost synonymous. WA 4: 322.20f (Psalm 119:31, First Psalms Commentary, 1513-1515). See also von Loewenich, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 79-81.

⁴ LW 25: 287; WA 56: 299.13ff (1515-1516 Romans Commentary).

⁵ LW 25: 287; WA 56: 299.17ff (Ibid.). While Luther wrote this early in his career, these ideas are echoed again later on. For example, in the 1535 Commentary on Galatians, he states, "Christ is the object of faith, or rather not the object but, so to speak, the One who is present in faith itself." LW 26: 129; WA 40/I: 228.34ff. In this sense he can say that "faith means to put on Christ." LW 27: 289; WA 2: 535.24 (1519 Galatians Commentary). See also LW 26: 352-3; WA 40/I: 540.2ff (1535 Galatians Commentary).

This emphasis on Christ and faith together is also an antidote to the theology of the cross becoming merely a *via negativa*. This is expressed eloquently in von Loewenich:

For the fact that Christ and faith belong together clearly shows...that faith is not a leap into a vacuum. It perhaps gropes in the darkness--and precisely there runs into Christ. It moves away from all experience and experiences Christ. And Christ is the firm possession of this faith.¹

Another aspect of faith is that it is not a present security or a means of escape from the realities of this world.² This does not mean, however, that there is no certainty in faith.³ Rather, this certainty can only be based on the experiences which have been qualified by faith already, or which are consequences of faith.⁴ Certainty of faith is not, therefore, a blind belief that "knows" how God "must" act in every situation and which can therefore avoid the darkness;

¹ von Loewenich, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 106.

² Luther writes, "The command to you is not to crawl into a corner of the desert, but to run out, if that is where you have been, and to offer your hands and your feet and your whole body, and to wager everything you have and do." LW 21: 27; WA 32: 319.24ff (Sermon on the Mount, 1521). Faith is not, therefore, an escape or security from the world, as some would do by going into the desert to be strengthened by faith. Rather, it involves entering into the uncertainties of this world and risking all, certain only of God's abiding promises! Althaus is thus correct when he states, "The theology of the cross is the theology of faith: the theology of faith is and remains, however, the theology of temptation [*Theologie der Anfechtung*]." The Theology of Martin Luther, 33-4.

³ Otto Pesch clarifies this issue of "certitude of salvation" as found in both Thomas Aquinas and Luther. He writes, "For Luther is at one with Catholic teaching in denying that the salvation of the Christian is safe beyond any threat and in excluding the idea that the Christian can objectively make sure of his salvation in a way that frees him henceforth from all anguish. . . .Accordingly, with a view to God's fidelity our salvation is irrevocably certain, but in view of human weakness and instability we cannot speak of certitude of final salvation, since a man can at any moment refuse to rely on God's fidelity." Otto H. Pesch, "Existential and Sapiential Theology--The Theological Confrontation between Luther and Thomas Aquinas," Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther, Jared Wicks, ed. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1970), 66.

⁴ LW 25: 232; WA 56: 246.14ff (1515-1516 Romans Commentary). See also LW 4: 321; WA 43: 367.35ff (1535-1545 Genesis Commentary).

rather it is a trust that even in the darkest nights, there is a certainty that God will lead you into a new and better unknown.

Finally, Luther's definition of faith does not mean a *carte blanche* rejection of reason. As has been already noted in the discussion on the hidden/revealed character of God, Luther is not as virulent towards reason as is often thought. This is also the case in his discussions on faith and reason. In the worldly realm, reason is of utmost importance to Luther. He states that "reason is the greatest, inestimable gift of God."¹ Among other things, reason is of inestimable worth in ordering the affairs of society. In fact, Luther goes so far as to suggest that the ablest and most intelligent children, those who can use reason most aptly, should be encouraged by their parents to enter the political sphere rather than the ministry:

There is need in this office of abler people than are needed in the office of preaching, so that it is necessary to keep the best child for this work; for in the preaching office Christ does the whole thing, by His Spirit, but in the government of the world one must use reason--from which the laws have come--for God has subjected temporal rule and the affairs of the body to reason (Genesis 2:19) and has not sent the Holy Spirit from heaven for this purpose.²

Sound government is the result of competent, well-trained people who are able to use their gift of reason to the utmost of their capabilities.

The clash between faith and reason comes about when reason tries to exert itself in areas beyond its competence. For Luther, this meant that reason must be "called into question when it approaches the boundary line of the Heavenly Kingdom."³ The realm of God is one where

¹ "Ratio maximum et inestimabile est donum Dei nec ea, quae in rebus humanis sapienter constituit et invenit, contemnenda sunt." WA 40/III: 612.31. (Comments on Isaiah 9:1, 1543-1544).

² LW 46: 242; WA 30/II: 562.6-13 (Sermon on Keeping Children in School, 1530).

³ Gerrish, Grace and Reason, 15.

God works through alien works to bring about the proper works, and these alien works do not appear reasonable or logical. If reason were able to explain these alien works of God, or to make them clear to all people, then faith would not be needed. But Luther insisted that human reason was not able to reveal Christ.¹ As Gerrish notes, "Human nature always objects to the way God does things."² Apart from faith, we seek God in the wrong places, just as Mary and Joseph looked for Jesus in the wrong places after they noticed he was not with them after their visit to Jerusalem (Luke 2:41-51).³ It is when reason tries to take the place of faith that Luther says, "*ratio adversatur fidem*."⁴ Righteousness in the presence of God can only be acquired by faith. When reason infringes upon this principle by proposing other ways towards unity with God that do not involve the scandal of the cross or the hidden/revealing self-revelation of God in the Incarnation, then Luther heaps condemnation upon it.

Luther, however, does not reject reason from all realms of faith. Faith, he insists, has the ability or the power to transform reason so that it again is useful. In a table talk on the right and wrong use of reason, Luther states that "when illuminated by the Holy Spirit, reason helps to interpret the Holy Scriptures. . . . reason without faith isn't and can't be helpful. . . . reason that's illuminated takes all its thoughts from the Word."⁵ As Gerrish succinctly states,

Reason illuminated by faith has some grasp of spiritual matters, and works inspired by faith are pleasing *coram Deo*. But if unregenerate reason presumes

¹ WA 10/I/1: 216.20; Lenker 1: 201 (Christmas Day Sermon, 1522).

² Gerrish, Grace and Reason, 19.

³ WA 17/II: 29.7ff (Sermon for First Sunday after Epiphany, 1525).

⁴ WA 39/I: 90.23; LW 34: 160 (Disputation on Justification, 1536). Gerrish, Grace and Reason, 20, n.1, gives a list of references of those things which reason cannot understand about the life of faith.

⁵ LW 54: 71; WATr 1: 191.25-33 (no. 439, 1533).

to pronounce on divine affairs, it shows itself to be utterly out of place and stone blind; and if works are performed apart from faith, they are not accepted by God.¹

Gerrish suggests that to comprehend the relationship between faith and reason, it must be understood that Luther spoke of reason in three distinct ways.² In the first case, he spoke positively about reason as that which should and, in fact, must prevail in human affairs: when people are *coram hominibus*. This reason is essential in the ordering of society. Second, Luther attacks reason viciously when he perceives that it is trying to infringe upon or justify, through human efforts, one's righteousness *coram Deo*.³ In this case reason is trespassing on the domain of faith. Third, Luther readily accepts a reason that has been "regenerated" or "illuminated by faith," a reason which is subject to the Word of God. In this case, it can be considered a "handmaiden of faith." From this distinction, therefore, it becomes clear that only when reason is illuminated by faith can it begin to see something of the revealed nature of God in the God hidden in the Incarnation. Such a reason is also central in providing the methodological principles on which a theology of the cross is based.

In summary, for Luther faith has Christ as its ground and centre, and it is only through faith that Christ can be seen as the God who is hidden in the Incarnation and cross. This faith is not one which offers a present security; rather, it leads people into the darkness where God

¹ Gerrish, Grace and Reason, 26.

² All three distinctions are delineated by Gerrish in Grace and Reason, 26.

³ It is in these instances that Luther also most strongly attacks philosophy, suggesting that to regard it as the substance of theology (*ipsam rem theologiae*) is not acceptable: "sed velle ipsam esse rem theologiae, das thut nichtt." WATr 5: 25.11-12 (no. 5245, 1532). He is willing to praise Cicero and Aristotle for their use of reason in the affairs of the world, but resists any efforts to apply them in the theological realm if they have not been illuminated by faith. Reason cannot go any further than material and formal causes. WA 242: 93.11; LW 1: 123 (Commentary on Genesis 2:21, 1535-1545).

dwells and where all that a person can do is to trust in God. Having said that, it must also be qualified that the faith which Luther envisions involves not only the entry into the darkness where there is no security, but also a certain confidence that once the cross is arrived at or the darkness is entered, a new, previously unknown way will be revealed to us, just as the hidden God is revealed. The backside view of God will be replaced with a vision of the face of God once our veils are removed.

C. The Understanding of Atonement

Luther rejected any notion that the person of Christ can be separated from the work of Christ. Such attempts are no more than a retreat back into speculative theology. As he clearly states,

Through the Gospel we are told who Christ is, in order that we may learn to know that He is our Saviour, that He delivers us from sin and death, helps us out of all misfortune, reconciles us to the Father, and makes us pious and saves us without our works. He who does not learn to know Christ in this way must go wrong. For even though you know that He is God's Son, that He died and rose again, and that He sits at the right hand of the Father, you have not yet learned to know Christ aright, and this knowledge still does not help you. You must also know and believe that He did all this for your sake, in order to help you.¹

This emphasis on the "for you" reinforces the idea that the theology of the cross is not a spectator theology.² While theologians of glory may discuss theories about the cross, in doing so the cross

¹ LW 30: 29-30; WA 12: 285.9-17 (*Sermons on 1 Peter*, 1522). See also Lienhard, Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ, 176-85. Staupitz, in calling Luther to focus on Christ's wounds, also gives similar advice. LW 48: 66; Cf. WATr 2: 112.9-19 (no. 1490, May 1532); WATr 2: 227.21-228/2 (no. 1820, Sept/Oct. 1532), and WATr 2: 582.15-24 (no. 2654a, Sept. 1532). This focus on the wounds of Christ was something that Bernard of Clairvaux had also suggested, as noted in the previous chapter.

² As Gerhard O. Forde describes it, in Where God Meets Man: Luther's Down-to-Earth Approach to the Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 33ff.

remains distant. It does not involve them personally. Moreover, any theories of atonement in these theologies of glory can just as easily be worked out in heaven, apart from the anthropological perspective. In a theology of glory, the issue becomes one of what must be given or done in order to appease the God in heaven. It is a matter of heavenly transactions. On the other hand, a theology of the cross recognizes that in atonement, something is given to humanity. As Forde notes, "The question is not whether there is blood precious enough to pay God, or even the devil, but whether God has acted decisively to win us. The question is whether God can actually give himself in such a way as to save us. For God is not the problem, we are."¹

There are two elements of atonement which Luther uses to delineate how God seeks to "solve" our "problem"; by dwelling in our midst ("God-with-us"), and by acting decisively for us ("God-for-us"). First, his emphasis on the idea of God-with-us, or Emmanuel, is found in his commentary on Galatians. Luther writes:

Christ was not only found among sinners, but of his own will and by the will of the Father *he wanted to be an associate of sinners and thieves* and those who were immersed in all sorts of sin. Therefore when the Law found him among thieves, it condemned and executed him as a thief.²

This action of solidarity has strong soteriological implications. As Lienhard states:

His work is redemption, it is salvation. Now, that redemption is realized by him, by his suffering, by his real solidarity with sinful human beings, and by his active obedience to the Father. How would he have been able to realize all that without entering into our flesh, without partaking at all points of our human existence?³

¹ Forde, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," Christian Dogmatics, 2 vols. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jensen, eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), vol. 2, 50.

² LW 26: 278; WA 40/I: 434.16-20 [Italics added] (1535 Galatians Commentary).

³ Lienhard, Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ, 221. This theme of solidarity with sinful humanity bringing about our salvation is one of Luther's common themes. See also pp. 132-33. (continued...)

What is important for Luther is that not only did God become flesh, but that Christ entered into solidarity with our *sinful* humanity. Luther states this in a graphic way:

When the merciful Father saw that we were being oppressed through the Law, that we were being held under a curse, and that we should not be liberated from it by anything, He sent his Son into the world, heaped all the sins of all men upon him and said to him, "Be Peter the denier, Paul the persecutor, blasphemer and assaulter, David the adulterer; the sinner who ate the apple in Paradise; the thief on the cross. In short, be the person of all men, the one who has committed the sins of all men."¹

In this vivid explanation, we see the extent of the solidarity which Christ displayed in the Incarnation. Christ identifies and enters into solidarity not only with humanity, but the sinfulness and the suffering of humanity. Christ's whole life is then one of salvific significance. His death is to be seen not so much in light of the unfolding of some theological schema, but as a result of his life and his taking upon himself of sinful flesh. As soon as his death becomes a theory, atonement becomes something that can be worked out in heaven, apart from humanity. It becomes a theology about the cross rather than a theology of the cross. Furthermore, if it is merely a theological schema, then both the Incarnation and God's solidarity with humanity, as expressed by Luther, are no longer of central importance. It is God's very presence that brings changes.

³(...continued)

Forde echoes this view as well: "Atonement takes place when Christ has absolutely entered our place and is attacked by the law, by sin, by death and the devil." Forde, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," 54-5.

¹ LW 26: 280; WA 40/I: 437.20-27 (1535 Galatians Commentary). In the sermons on the Magnificat, Luther gives another example of this solidarity with humanity in conjunction with the notion of God acting for us: "You must feel the pinch of poverty in the midst of your hunger and learn by experience what hunger and poverty are, with no provision on hand and no help in yourself or any other person, but in God only; so that the work of God may be God's alone and impossible to be done by any other. You must not only think and speak of a low estate but actually come to be in a low estate and caught in it, without any human aid, so that God alone may do the work." LW 21: 347-48; WA 7: 593.30-594.3 (Sermon on the Magnificat, 1521).

Second, there is also in Luther's understanding of atonement the stress on God-for-us. His repeated use of *pro nobis* and *pro me* points to the fact that God does something for us, something beyond entering into solidarity with us. One of the best examples of this theme is found in Luther's concept of the "joyous exchange." In a letter to George Spenlein, dated April 8, 1516, he writes:

Therefore my dear Friar, learn Christ and him crucified. Learn to praise him, and despairing of yourself, say, "Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, just as I am your sin. You have taken upon yourself what is mine and given me what is yours. You have taken upon yourself what you were not and have given to me what I was not."¹

Through this exchange, God does more than identify with humanity; God actually acts in Christ for us, giving us a "foreign" righteousness. This brings into focus the emphasis Luther placed on justification by faith through grace. God acts, liberating us from the sin which we are unable to overcome. God does what we cannot do. Atonement, then, is more than Christ becoming Peter or Paul or David, or entering into solidarity with sinful humanity (LW 26: 280); it involves Christ dying in order to defeat sin and its powers. Atonement occurs because sin and the law cannot ultimately conquer his invincible righteousness or keep him in the tomb. Christ's righteousness defeats those powers which would seek to keep us in oppression. Since sinful humanity could not do so, Christ did it "for us."

This duality of "God-for-us" and "God-with-us" schema of atonement in Luther is perhaps best illustrated in his 1517-18 commentary on Hebrews. Commenting on Hebrews 2:3, he says that salvation is both something which is done for us (*pro nobis*), and something which

¹ LW 48: 12; WABr 1: 35.24-27 (Letter of April 8, 1516).

Christ does by being in our presence (*coram nobis*).¹ Salvation occurs, therefore, both *extra nos* (outside of us, through Christ acting for us), and through solidarity, by Christ being with us.

The danger in focusing only on the Christ-with-us is that it can lead to imitating the Christ who is in our midst as a means to salvation, to the exclusion of trusting in Christ alone to be justified *coram Deo* (in the presence of God). God's act of justification must come before our *imitatio*. As Luther explains,

If any man wants to follow Christ as an example, he must firmly believe in the divine sign (the *sacramentum*) that Christ suffered and died for him. Consequently, those who contrive to blot out their sins by good works and penitential disciplines do err very greatly, for they begin by trying to follow the example set by Christ when they ought to begin with the sacrament wrought by Christ (i.e., the passion of Christ).²

To focus solely on the example of Christ, to the exclusion of Christ as sacrament, also encourages the notion that suffering is a work of righteousness in and of itself. What is missing is the word of promise, the Word which has done everything "for us." Prenter called this approach a "medieval theology of the cross without the Word."³ Such an approach makes suffering an end in itself. Luther rejects this notion, however, suggesting in the explanation of

¹ LW 29: 123; WA 57/III: 114.7-11 (1517-1518 Hebrews Commentary).

² 1517-1518 Hebrews Commentary. Translation taken from Luther: Early Theological Works, James Atkinson, ed., Library of Christian Classics: Ichthus Edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 46. See also LW 29: 124; WA 57/III: 114.15-19.

Luther says much the same thing in his first Galatians commentary when he writes, ". . . St. Augustine teaches that the suffering of Christ is both a sacrament and an example --a sacrament because it signifies the death of sin in us and grants it to those who believe, an example because it also behooves us to imitate him in bodily suffering and dying. The sacrament is what is stated in Rom. 4:25: 'Who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification.' The example is what is stated in 1 Peter 2:21: 'Christ has suffered for us, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps'." LW 27: 238; WA 2: 501.34-502.2 (1519 Galatians Commentary).

³ Prenter, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 5.

Thesis 21 of the Heidelberg Disputation that recognition of the suffering of Christ on the cross is helpful only when it serves to deflate and destroy human works and one's self-pre-occupations.¹ This forces one to recognize that only Christ's suffering is of any value in terms of our righteousness before God.

The other extreme is just as dangerous, however. To focus only on what Christ has done "for us" while dismissing or avoiding its implications for us results in a theology *about* the cross. This is nothing more than a spectator theology. Prenter called this version of a theology of glory a "post-reformation theology of the word without the cross."² For Luther, that would be an avoidance of the cross and a rejection of the faith which conforms a person to Christ.³ Such an approach avoids Luther's sage advice:

Though our suffering and cross should never be so exalted that we think we can be saved by it or earn the least merit through it, nevertheless we should suffer after Christ, that we may be conformed to him. For God has appointed that we should not only believe in the crucified Christ, but also be crucified with him, as he clearly shows in so many places in the gospels.⁴

In summary, Luther's understanding of atonement emphasized both the God-for-us and the God-with-us aspects of salvation. God in Christ must become completely one with us, even to the extent of entering into our sinfulness. Only then can Christ exchange his righteousness for

¹ LW 31: 53; WA 1: 362.30ff (Heidelberg Disputation, 1518).

² Prenter, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 5-6.

³ See here the description of conformity to Christ according to Luther in Lage, Luther's Christology, 81.

⁴ LW 51: 198; WA 32: 29.3-8 (Sermon on Cross and Suffering, 1530). In his Letter of Consolation to the Christians at Halle (1527), he writes, "It is unimaginable that Christ our head should wear a crown of thorns and die on the cross but that we should be saved without any suffering and with nothing but joy and delight. But if we are to suffer, then let it be suffering which God inflicts upon us and not that which we choose to bring upon ourselves. for he knows best what will serve and help us. What we choose for ourselves won't amount to anything." LW 43: 165; WA 23: 431.21-25.

our sinfulness, his life for our death. But Christ also acts for us to bring about our salvation, because we cannot achieve it on our own. Christ does for us what we cannot. We cannot become divine through our attempts to climb into heaven. As Luther stated,

For our righteousness looks down from heaven and descends to us. But those godless men have presumed to ascend into heaven by means of their righteousness and from there to bring the truth which has risen among us from the earth.¹

Only by Christ coming to earth for us, and by his giving up of his righteousness for us, can we be saved. The Christian is called to follow the Christ in response to this. But to follow the Christ means to enter into the darkness, to face suffering, and to finally die before one can enter into the new way which was previously unknown to us, hidden from our eyes. Salvation comes from the One whom we would least expect--an outcast on the cross. There, at the foot of the cross, not only is the hidden God revealed to us through the eyes of faith, but there salvation is also accomplished for us by the one who came into our midst and entered into our world of sin and suffering.

¹ LW 27: 225; WA 2: 493.12-14 (1519 Galatians Commentary). Those who attempt to ascend into heaven only bring danger to themselves. As Luther graphically explains, "...they suppose that they are on the right road to heaven. But this is a bridge and a stairway made of spider web; the higher they ascend on it, the deeper and the more shamefully they fall into the abyss of hell." LW 24: 36; WA 45: 493.1-4 (1537 John Commentary).

This leads Lage to conclude that "We do not ascend; rather it is through Christ's descent that it is possible to be conformed to Christ. We are conformed to Christ not as a consequence of our preparatory attempts to become 'like' Christ, but solely by means of God's gracious activity." Lage, *Luther's Christology*, 85. Cf. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart, trans. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 167, and Steinmetz, "Luther and the Ascent of Jacob's Ladder," *Church History* 55 no. 2 (June 1986), 179-92.

III. LUTHER'S THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS AS A METHODOLOGY

It would be too narrow an interpretation of the theology of the cross to restrict it to its Christological and theological features. Such an approach would overlook its hermeneutical principles, principles which Luther relied on throughout his life.¹ As was noted in the previous chapter, some of these principles Luther had learned from the *via moderna*, others from the mystics, and still others from his study of Scripture and the theologians of the early church. Luther states these principles clearly in his commentary on Hebrews 2:1, where he states:

First [the Apostle] declares the humanity of Christ and then proceeds to his divinity. As a consequence, he establishes that principle by which true knowledge of God may be found. . . . Therefore, whoever wishes to rise to a true love of God and knowledge of God, let him put away all the human and metaphysical rules on how to attain to the knowledge of God, and as his first task let him seek to understand the humanity of Christ.²

This principle is clearly seen in his many Christmas sermons.³ The focus on the Incarnation as a starting point is also a guiding principle or foundation for the approach he used in dealing with many of the controversial issues in his community and nation.⁴

The hermeneutic of the theology of the cross can thus be discerned from the way in which Luther developed his Christology. In this section the hermeneutical principles will be

¹ Many Luther scholars recognize this hermeneutical principle in the theology of the cross. A sampling of authors will provide an indication of this: Gerhard Ebeling, Luther: an Introduction to his Thought, 69ff, 226ff; von Loewenich, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 12-13; and Del Pino, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," 73.

² Luther: Early Theological Works, James Atkinson, ed., 31-2. cf. LW 29: 111; WA 57/III: 99.1-10 (1517-1518 Hebrews Commentary).

³ A good sample of these Christmas sermons are gathered together in LW 52; WA 10/I.

⁴ This will be discussed later in this section under the heading, "Application to Church and Society," and in the case study on Luther's dealing with the peasants' war, which will be addressed in the following chapter.

discussed, as revealed in his Christology and through other, related themes of importance to Luther. First will be a discussion of the centrality of the Incarnation and its implications for solidarity, both between God and humanity, and between human beings. This will include a look at the theme of inversion which makes this a possibility. Second, there will be reflection on Luther's call to deal honestly with reality, which includes the question of what it means to be human, and the role of struggle in the Christian life. Third, there will be an examination of a few of Luther's attempts to apply the theology of the cross to the church and society of his time. This will include his attempts to reduce some of the artificial distinctions between the sacred and the profane, his understanding of the sacraments, and some of the economic implications which arise from a theology of the cross.

A. Incarnation, Cross and Solidarity

Central to Luther's thought was the humanity of Christ.¹ Through faith in Christ the hidden God is also revealed. No other revelation from God is needed. Therefore, any attempts to discern God's nature and will for us through speculating as to God's nature in heaven or God's will in heaven is not to be trusted, since it belongs to a "theology of glory." In thesis 19 of the Heidelberg Disputation, he reveals his attitude towards a theologian of glory: "That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God [as God is in heaven] as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened."²

Luther goes on to explain how he attempted to assist younger theologians from following this theology of glory, or ascent, and what the dangers are of following such a path:

¹ LW 29: 111; WA 57/III: 99.1-10 (1517-1518 Hebrews Commentary).

² LW 31: 52; WA 1: 361.32-3 (1518 Heidelberg Disputation).

I have often advised and still advise younger theologians today that they must so study the Holy Scriptures that they refrain from investigating the Divine Majesty and his terrible works (*terribilia opera*). God does not want us to learn to know him in this way. You cannot nakedly associate with his naked Godhead. But Christ is our way to God. Those who speculate about the majesty of God are crushed and led to despair by Satan.¹

The emphasis on the Incarnation and cross also reveals a stress on God's coming down from to heaven to us, rather than on our ascending into heaven to discover God's will there.² What God wants us to know is to be found in the Christ who came into our midst. In this sense, Luther holds to a "Christology from below." In a sermon for Christmas Day, he words it in this way:

Whoever disregards the life and sojourn of Christ and would prefer to look for him in another manner, now that he sits on his heavenly throne, would be mistaken. He must seek Him as he was and walked on earth, and he will find life. Here he came to be our life, light and salvation. Here on earth everything took place that we are to believe of him, and so it is said most appropriately, "In him was life."³

¹ LW 16: 54-55; WA 31/II: 38.21-25 (Isaiah Commentary, 1527-30). Luther does not state specifically what God's "terrible works" are, but later on in the same passage he talks about the "consuming fire," which presumably is a result of trying to see God's face (the God of Majesty in the heavens) rather than being content with the "backside of God," that is, the Incarnation. If this is indeed the case, then the "terrible works of God," which are nothing less than God's purity which destroys sinners, should not be confused with God's alien works which reveal the total need for God to act for us through God's proper works.

² Forde stresses this aspect of Luther's thought in Where God meets Man, esp. 18-31. Del Pino argues that the theology of ascent is an undisguised theology of glory. According to him, the basic flaw with a theology of ascent/theology of glory is that it requires human works to climb the ladder into heaven, while rejecting God who has come down the ladder to this earth to be revealed in the person of Christ. It will not accept God's alien work, preferring instead God's own work, even though they thus misunderstand it. Del Pino, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," 89ff, 125ff.

³ LW 52: 56; WA 10/I/1: 201.10-15 (Christmas Day Sermon, 1521-1522 Church Postils). Luther repeats this theme throughout his life. See also LW 17: 331; WA 31/II: 516-17 (Isaiah Commentary, 1527-1530).

Because of this emphasis on the incarnate God, who is hidden from the view of those who would attempt to ascend into heaven to find God, there is also a renewed emphasis on the need for solidarity with those who are in the midst of struggle. Since God is hidden in our midst, we are to be Christs to one another.¹ But here Luther is more specific than speaking of God's--and our!--solidarity with humanity in general. Rather, God has entered into solidarity with sinful humanity, and into solidarity with those who struggle and are tempted, those who are oppressed. In a revealing passage in his commentary on Hebrews, Luther describes God's deliberate solidarity with the marginalized as a matter of God choosing where the throne--and thus dwelling place--of God should be. He writes:

For nothing is more unlike a throne, especially God's throne, than the people of Christ, if we have regard to the outward appearance. For these people look like no kingdom, but rather like a people in exile; a people not living but always a-dying; a people not in glory but in shame; a people living not in wealth but in the direst poverty. And just exactly the same, whoever wishes to be a partaker of this kingdom, must experience the same ignominies and sufferings in his own person. The insignia of Christians are poverty, tribulation, sorrow. This is how God's throne should be distinguished.²

Since God's throne is found in the midst of those who struggle, Luther is able to define the communion of saints as the solidarity of those who struggle. When we struggle we are not alone;

¹ Luther uses this phrase, "Christs to one another" repeatedly in his treatise, "The Freedom of a Christian," 1520. LW 31: 366ff; WA 7: 35ff. In commenting on Psalm 103 [104], he writes: "He is our abstraction, and we are his concretion (ita ipse nostrum abstractum, nos ipsius concretum)." LW 11: 318; WA 4: 173.23 (First Psalms Commentary, 1513-1515).

² Hebrews Commentary, 1517-1518. Luther: Early Theological Writings, 38; LW 29: 117-18; WA 57/III: 107.16-108.3. Kittelson argues that it was for this reason that Luther holds Mary in such high esteem: "Mary stood as a lesson to all Christians not because she was so pure but because she was so impoverished, a woman who was pregnant but not married. The lesson was obvious: 'You must not only think and speak in a lowly manner,' he concluded, 'but actually become impoverished and be completely wrapped up in poverty so that, without any human help, God alone may do the work'." LW 21:347-8; WA 7: 594.1-4 (Sermon on the Magnificat, 1521). James M. Kittelson, Luther the Reformer: The Story of the Man and His Career, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 166.

"Christ and the church . . . are suffering and dying with us. . . . Indeed, we set out upon the road of suffering and death accompanied by the entire church."¹ This solidarity with those who are suffering is a result of Luther's emphasis on the Incarnation. Since Christ entered into our sufferings, we too should do likewise. As Luther states, "we are bound to each other in such a way that no one may forsake the other in his distress but is obliged to assist and help him as he himself would like to be helped (Mt. 7:12)."² Because Christ is hidden in our midst, it follows that,

if you wish to serve Christ and wait on him, very well, you have your sick neighbour close at hand. Go to him and serve him, and you will surely find Christ in him, not outwardly but in his word. If you do not wish or care to serve your neighbour you can be sure that if Christ lay there instead you would not do so either and would let him lie there.³

This emphasis on the Incarnation and solidarity also conforms with Luther's accent on the inversions or great reversals inherent in the theology of the cross. The sermons on the Magnificat are one of the best examples of this.⁴ The mighty are humbled, the lowly are raised up. This theme is also found in the concepts of the hidden/revealed God, and the alien and proper works of God. Thus Luther can state in thesis four of the Heidelberg Disputation: "Although the works of God always seem unattractive and appear evil, they are nevertheless really eternal merits."⁵ In the explanation he adds,

¹ LW 42: 163, 161-2; WA 6: 132.12-15, 131.7-20 (Fourteen Consolations, 1520).

² LW 43: 122; WA 23: 345.20-23 (Whether One May Flee a Deadly Plague, 1527). See also LW 43: 125-30; WA 23: 351-63 (Ibid.).

³ LW 43: 130-31; WA 23: 363.18-23 (Ibid.).

⁴ LW 21: 295-358; WA 7: 544-604 (Sermon on the Magnificat, 1521).

⁵ LW 31: 44; WA 1: 356.33-4 (Heidelberg Disputation, 1518).

The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up. . . . he humbles us thoroughly, making us despair, so that he may exalt us in his mercy, giving us hope. . . . In this way, consequently, the unattractive works which God does in us, that is, those which are humble and devout, are really eternal, for humility and fear of God are our entire merit.¹

The wrong view of God, which ignores God's decision to become Incarnate (an inversion!), therefore, leads to idolatry.² People worship gods set up in their own images of what God should be like in the heavens, ignoring God's chosen means of revelation on earth. This is a central characteristic of the theology of glory. Luther described this speculative theology image of God as an *apfelgott*, used to satisfy personal desires.³ Some of these gods Luther explicitly names: money, riches, and the desire for them.⁴

¹ LW 31: 44; WA 1: 356.35-357.17 (Heidelberg Disputation, 1518). See also LW 31: 99; WA 1: 540.7-10 (Explanations of the 95 Theses, 1517), and LW 24:59; WA 45: 515.3-20 (Commentary on John 14:6ff, 1537). Abraham Rotstein also emphasizes the theme of inversions in Luther's treatise on "The Freedom of A Christian," where there is a dialectic between the freedom of a Christian who is Lord over all, while yet being a servant to all. Rotstein, "The Apocalyptic Tradition: Luther and Marx," Political Theology in the Canadian Context, Benjamin Smillie, ed., SR Supplements no. 11, Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 1982), 147-208.

² LW 25: 156-8; WA 56: 176-8 (1515-1516 Romans Commentary).

³ Luther's Large Catechism. Comments on the Ten Commandments. The Book of Concord, Theodore G. Tappert, trans. and ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 366-7. For the terms "*apfelgott*" and *apfelkonig*," see WA 31/I: 234.3 (Psalm 117, 1530).

⁴ Luther writes, "In short, [the desire for the goods of the world] is the greatest and most universal belief or religion on earth." LW 21: 12; WA 32: 306.36-7 (Sermon on the Mount, 1521).

B. Dealing Honestly with Reality

Luther stated in thesis 21 of the Heidelberg Disputation that "A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is."¹ Theologians of glory are always trying to make the things of God appear in ways that are not true. This is clearly revealed in Luther's comments on merits, indulgences and pilgrimages. While in the period 1517-1519 he still can place a positive construction on indulgences,² and talk about merits in terms of an incarnate faith (*fides incarnata*) even in his 1531 Galatians lectures,³ he cannot accept them as alternatives to the grace and mercy of Christ, which alone justifies us

¹ LW 31: 53; WA 1: 362.21-2 (1518 Heidelberg Disputation).

² His acceptance of indulgences at this time, criticizing only their misuse, is evident throughout the Explanations of the 95 Theses (1518). Luther suggests that indulgences are demeritorious when taken by themselves apart from good works (LW 31: 150; WA 1: 570.6); that popes are not after money, but the salvation of souls in their use of indulgences (LW 31: 200; WA 1: 599.2-4); and that "it is not the indulgences themselves, but that the perverted abuse of indulgences is harmful" (LW 31: 201; WA 1: 599.21-2). Luther also suggests that one possible abuse of indulgences, however, arises when people see indulgences as a way to escape punishment merely by contributing money (LW 31: 201; WA 1: 599.31-34). It is this mentality or approach that turns "salvation" into a "business transaction."

³ LW 26: 266; WA 40/I: 416.8-417.21 (1535 Galatians Commentary). For a more detailed look at the themes of absolute and incarnate faith, see Peter Manns, "Absolute and Incarnate Faith—Luther on Justification in the Galatians Commentary of 1531-1535," *Catholic Scholars Dialogue with Luther*, Jared Wicks, ed. (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1970), 126-131. Manns argues that Luther makes the needed distinction between *fides absoluta*, which is the "faith that is the exclusive cause of justification without works," and *fides incarnata*, "the faith that works through 'faithful doing' in the works of faith" (Ibid., 126). As Luther writes, "...so the Holy Spirit speaks about faith in different ways in scripture: sometimes, if I may speak this way, about an abstract of an absolute faith and sometimes about a concrete, composite or incarnate faith." LW 26: 264; WA 40/I: 414.24ff (1535 Galatians Commentary). While Luther's focus is primarily on *fides absoluta*, he also is able to write, "Therefore faith always justifies and makes alive; and yet it does not remain alone, that is, idle. Not that it does not remain alone on its own level and in its own function, for it always justifies alone. But it is incarnate and becomes man; that is, it neither is nor remains idle or without love." LW 26: 272; WA 40/I: 427.11-14 (Ibid.). It is as a result of one's justification *coram Deo*, and as a result of this absolute faith that one is led to live a life of faith incarnate—faith active in love.

in the presence of God. Theologians of glory have abused indulgences and merits, thereby turning one's relationship to God into a business transaction. Luther recognized the desire for wealth and power behind this, as well as the attempt to turn God's grace into a commodity. Thus he writes: "Yet the theologian of glory still receives money for his treasury, while the theologian of the cross, on the other hand, offers the merits of Christ freely."¹ From his perspective, Luther felt that theologians of glory attempted to go around the reality or fact that human attempts at salvation lead to self-constructed idolatry. God could be left out of the picture.

While a theology of the cross calls one to take Christ's death seriously, it also calls a person to deal with the reality of what it means to be human. As already noted above, Luther felt that the goal of the human was not to climb the ladder into heaven, there to see God.² Rather, to be human was to live with one's neighbours, and to discover by faith the revealed God in our midst--the God who has come to us. This action by God prevents a works righteousness, but it also defines what it means to be human. Luther makes this extremely clear in a letter to George Spalatin, dated June 30, 1530, where he is concerned about Melancthon wanting to climb the ladder into heaven, after the manner of the speculative theologians. Luther writes:

. . . continually admonish Philip not to become like God, but to fight that innate ambition to be like God, which was planted in us in paradise by the devil. This [ambition] doesn't do us any good. It drove Adam from paradise, and it alone also drives us away, and drives peace away from us. *In summary: we are to be men and not God; it will not be otherwise. . . .*³

¹ LW 31: 227; WA 1: 614.22-7 (Explanations of the Ninety Five Theses, 1518).

² Luther argues that we don't journey to God's kingdom, it must come to us. LW 42: 41; WA 2: 98.23-8 (Sermons on the Lord's Prayer, 1519).

³ LW 49: 337; WABr 5: 415.41-6 (Letter of June 30, 1530). In the WA, this quote is in Latin, except for the phrase italicised above, which is in German: "*Wir sollen menschen und nicht Gott sein. Das ist die summa; Es wird doch nich anders*"

(continued...)

This summary of Luther's has some interesting implications. First, it reminds us that God, not the human, is to be at the centre of our lives. Anything else is idolatry. Therefore a theology of ascent, or glory, which tries to climb up the ladder into heaven and invade the domain that belongs to God, is sinful because it is "curved in upon itself,"¹ rather than focused on God. As Luther states, "The natural man cannot will God to be God. Rather he wants himself to be God, and God not to be."²

Second, it dictates to us how we should consider seeking God. Luther tells us, for example, that we are not to be like some monks. For them, to see God means "sitting in a cell

³(...continued)

This theme is also found in Luther's First Psalms Commentary. Writing on Psalm 74:4, he states, "For one who acts proudly attempts to be equal or superior to God, but one who acts humbly tries to make himself even lower than any creature." LW 10:439; WA 3: 498.6-8 (First Psalms Commentary, 1513-1515).

Luther's comments on marriage in 1525 (when he got married himself!) also reveal this theme, when he discusses some priest's rejections of marriage because of its fleshly or "earthly" connotations: "Whoever is ashamed of marriage is also ashamed of being human, and being called human, and tries improve on what God has made." WA 18: 277.26-7 (On Marriage, 1525).

¹ This phrase, *incurvatus in se, curvas est in se ipsos*, or other, similar variations, are often used by Luther to describe the character of sin. See LW 10:241; WA 3: 292.18 (Psalm 51:10, First Psalms Lectures, 1513-1515); see also LW 25: 245, 291, 313, 345, 513; WA 56: 258.10, 304.26, 325.9, 356.5-7, 518.6 (1515-1516 Romans Commentary); and LW 33: 175-6; WA 18: 709.14-15 (Bondage of the Will, 1525).

² LW 31: 10; WA 1: 225.1-2 (Thesis 17, Disputation Against Scholastic Theology, 1517). While one of the goals of theology is to draw attention to the fact that people are not to try to ascend into heaven or to try and become gods, Luther suggests that the role of the government is to keep people from becoming "wild beasts," or "less than human." LW 46: 237; WA 30/II: 555.20 (A Sermon on Keeping Children in School, 1530). See also George O. Forell, "Luther and Politics," *Luther and Culture*, Martin Luther Lectures, vol. 4 (Decorah, Iowa: Luther College Press, 1960), 10-11. Therefore both theology or "Christian law," and government or "natural law" have a similar task: to insure that people become and remain human, rather than fleeing from all that this entails.

and elevating your thoughts heavenward, leading a 'contemplative life,' as they call it."¹ As Luther correctly states, the role of the human is not to flee from this world, to attempt to flee from human company, but rather to live in this society as Christ did.²

Third, we discover that people arrive at a knowledge of the self only in the presence of God and by considering Christ. In other words, self-realization does not happen in isolation from God's presence, or by mere introspection.³ Such actions would despise the passion of Christ on the cross, argues Lienhard.⁴ To reject the statement by God that we are sinful, and that we are to be involved in this world, is to seek to become counterfeit saints with a counterfeit sanctity.⁵

Fourth, a theology of glory does not accept the reality of our humanness, a reality which also includes suffering and struggles, pain, death, and having to deal constantly with other people who are also *simul justus et peccator*. Luther called this his theology of *Anfechtung*--of struggles,

¹ LW 21: 37; WA 32: 328.24-7 (Sermon on the Mount, 1521). Unfortunately, Luther does not specify who these monks might be, or which order they might represent.

This criticism, of course, would not be true for those monks active in society, whose actions flowed from the "contemplative life," as Thomas Aquinas described it (*Summa Theologiae*, II, 2, 182, art. 1-3), but rather those who had neither made the vital connection between contemplation and action nor grasped the significance of the Incarnation.

Luther makes similar comments about what a pure heart is; "The answer can be given quickly, and you do not have to climb up to heaven or run to a monastery for it and establish it with your own ideas. . . . And you should realize that when a monk in the monastery is sitting in deepest contemplation, excluding the world from his heart altogether, and thinking about the Lord God the way he himself paints and imagines Him, he is actually sitting--if you will pardon the expression--in the dung, not up to his knees, but up to his ears." LW 21: 33-4; WA 32: 325.23-30 (Sermon on the Mount, 1521).

² LW 21: 85-6; WA 32: 370.33-371.17 (Sermon on the Mount, 1521). Luther says much the same thing in LW 27: 239; WA 2: 502.29-34 (1519 Galatians Commentary).

³ WA 1: 337.34 (Two Sermons on the Passion of Christ, 1518).

⁴ Lienhard, *Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ*, 104.

⁵ LW 21: 28-9; WA 32: 320.33-321.23 (Sermon on the Mount, 1521).

trials and temptations.¹ Again, the definition of what it means to be human is closely related to what God reveals to us about ourselves in Christ. Just as Christ did not avoid struggles, suffering and death, so too we should not expect to avoid it either. While there are always those who demand that God deliver them from all trials, Luther reminds us that we should neither seek nor seek to avoid them.² Moreover, these trials serve the purpose of revealing our sinfulness, our distance from God--which we cannot traverse on our own--and it forces us to learn about ourselves and God.³

There is another aspect of the theology of the cross which should be considered here, and that is how Christ's cross is related to the cross of those who would deign to follow Christ. Luther was against the notion that imitating Christ was a way to "earn" one's justification *coram Deo*. That would go against his understanding of justification. As he clearly states,

The error is committed by those who immediately want to imitate with their presumed powers all of those things which have been well regarded by God and thus want to be so regarded themselves, because they are doing the same things as the saints to whom works have been reckoned as righteous. This is merely seeking a righteousness of works and in no way an imitation of the saints but rather a perversion of their example.⁴

¹ A preliminary definition of *Anfechtung* is found in LW 42: 181ff (Introduction to Luther's treatise, "Comfort When Facing Grave Temptations," 1521).

² LW 42: 73; WA 2: 124.18-26 (Sermons on the Lord's Prayer, 1519).

³ LW 42: 74; WA 2: 125.18-22 (*Ibid.*).

⁴ LW 25: 263-4; WA 56: 276.26-9 (1515-1516 Romans Commentary). While this passage refers to the imitation of the saints rather than the imitation of Christ, the principle is the same: imitation is to be rejected if it is done so only to be considered righteous before God. As Lage puts it, "The imitation of Christ is improper if it is a slavish, legalistic or literal mimicry, or merely the emulative repetition of the works of some other." *Luther's Christology*, 45.

Imitating Christ, however, is not rejected. Luther only wants to make sure that *imitatio Christi* can only occur after Christ as gift is accepted; Christ remains more a gift than example.¹ One is only able to imitate Christ once conformity to Christ has occurred as a result of God's actions. It is then that God dwells with us and in us. Once God has shaped or "formed" a person into a new creation who is "in Christ," that person will want to imitate Christ in response to God's actions. It is thus the result of the activity of God rather than any specific activities of a person.²

It is only from this perspective that the role of suffering in Luther's thought can be understood. It has often been suggested that Luther, because of his theology of the cross, glorified suffering and the cross. A cursory reading of the explanation to thesis 21 of the Heidelberg Disputation might indeed give that impression: "[Theologians of glory] hate the cross and suffering," but ". . . friends of the cross say that the cross is good."³ A more careful reading reveals, however, that such was not the case. The discrepancy arises as a result of not taking into account Luther's careful distinction between self-chosen suffering and suffering which arises as a result of being faithful to the Gospel. Self-chosen crosses and suffering are repeatedly

¹ LW 26: 247; WA 40/I: 389.20 (1535 Galatians Commentary). Lage correctly notes that "although Luther criticized much of the medieval understanding of the *imitatio Christi*, this was done in order to reform the concept rather than as a rejection of it. . . . The *imitatio* was not replaced by Luther's Christ-mysticism and *conformitas Christi* as claimed, but was retained in conjunction with these essential Christological themes. While it is true that *conformitas Christi* replaced *imitatio Christi* in terms of soteriological significance, the *imitatio* retains its historical significance in the realm of morality." Lage, Luther's Christology, 4-5.

² von Loewenich considers conformity to Christ a work wrought by God, while imitation of Christ is seen as an attempt at works righteousness. von Loewenich, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 196, note 157. Yet this definition seems to overlook the positive aspect that *imitatio Christi* plays in the Christian life in the thought of Luther.

³ LW 31: 53; WA 1: 362.26-30 (Heidelberg Disputation, 1518).

denounced by Luther. He insists that "we do not make our suffering meritorious before God."¹

There is nothing glorious or special about suffering. Luther goes on to point out that those who choose their own crosses and sufferings

flaunt their suffering and make a great merit of it and thus blaspheme God, because it is not a true suffering but a stinking, self-chosen suffering. But we say that we earn nothing by our suffering and therefore do not frame it as such beautiful monstrances as they do.²

When people choose their own crosses or suffering, or when they presume that their own self-appointed sufferings are meritorious, therefore, Luther is quick to object. The only suffering that is meritorious is that of Christ. As he clearly states,

This, you see, is the way we teach concerning suffering, and you should accustom yourself to distinguish carefully between the suffering of Christ and all other suffering and know that his is a heavenly suffering and ours is worldly, that his suffering accomplishes everything, while ours does nothing except that we become conformed to Christ, and that therefore the suffering of Christ is the suffering of a lord, whereas ours is the suffering of a servant.³

Furthermore, when trust is placed in self-chosen crosses and suffering, one does not have to trust God; self-chosen crosses are always ones that a person is able to handle without outside help.

On the other hand, Luther does not reject the suffering which comes about for the sake of the gospel. It is one of the realities of life. It is to be expected whenever and wherever the

¹ LW 51: 205-6 WA 32: 36.18-19 (Sermon on Cross and Suffering, 1530).

² LW 51: 199; WA 32: 30.6-8 (Ibid.). Luther earlier in this same sermon states, "our suffering and cross should never be so exalted that we think we can be saved by it or earn the least merit through it; nevertheless we should suffer after Christ, that we may be conformed to him." LW 51: 198; WA 32: 29.3-6 (Ibid.).

³ LW 51: 208; WA 32: 39.1-5 (Ibid.). Again, it should be noted that Luther's approach here is consistent with his approach to the imitation of Christ. What Christ has done "for us" brings righteousness before God, while our imitation of Christ and our being "crucified with Christ" flow from this new standing before God, rather than as preconditions of it.

gospel is preached, taught, heard, learned and practised.¹ Thus, "Wherever Christ is, Judas, Pilate, Herod, Caiaphas, and Annas will inevitably be also, so also his cross."² Yet even then, it is not something that is to be gladly accepted. As Luther realistically states, "Taking up the cross is by nature something that causes pain."³ That applies to suffering as well as the cross. While suffering cannot be loved because of the pain it causes, it is also avoided because it seems scandalous to associate God with suffering. However, suffering was considered by Luther as an "alien work" of God, and the alien works of God were not things desired by human nature.⁴ Even when he boldly states, "A theologian of the cross . . . teaches that punishments, crosses and death are the most precious treasury of all. . . ,"⁵ it must be remembered that they are only "precious treasures" because of hindsight: they serve to humble a person, forcing one to trust in God alone and not on one's own strength. They are precious treasures, therefore, in the sense

¹ LW 51: 200; WA 32: 31.22-3 (Sermon on Cross and Suffering, 1530).

² LW 43: 63; WA 10/II: 54.29-31 (Letter to All who Suffer Persecution, 1522). Elsewhere he states, "For just as we cannot get along without eating and drinking, so we cannot get along without affliction and suffering." LW 51: 207; WA 32: 38.2-3 (Sermon on Cross and Suffering, 1530). Earlier in the same work, he writes that even then, this Christian suffering should be the kind that, "if it was possible, we would gladly be rid of," since this suffering is "visited upon us by the devil or the world." LW 51: 198; WA 32: 29.24-5 (Ibid.). Following Christ raises opposition.

³ LW 43: 183; WA 32: 547.17-18 (That a Christian Should Bear his Cross with Patience, 1530). See also LW 51: 198; WA 32: 29.18-21 (Sermon on Suffering and Cross, 1530).

Moltmann reflects this perspective of Luther when he writes at the very outset of his book, The Crucified God, "The cross is not and cannot be loved." Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology, R. A. Wilson and John Bowden, trans. (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 1.

⁴ LW 8: 29; WA 44: 600.19-601.2 (Commentary on Genesis, 1535-1545). In one place in this passage, Luther writes: "Christus occiditur coram mundo, damnatur et descendit ad inferos. Sed coram Deo est salus totius mundi, a principio usque ad finem." LW 8: 29; WA 600.33-4 (Ibid.).

⁵ LW 31: 225; WA 1: 613.23-5 (Explanations of the 95 Theses, 1518).

that they work to insure that one is justified before God only through Christ. In that sense, they are good; but one does not desire or seek out suffering.

Obviously, therefore, there are differences between Christian suffering which is for the sake of the gospel and which glorifies Christ, and self-chosen suffering which ends up glorifying only itself and those who choose it. There is, however, a further distinction which Luther made concerning Christian and self-chosen suffering. Christian suffering is unique in that even though it brings a person into the "darkness," because it is connected to the cross of Christ, the person is neither alone in suffering nor is suffering the last word. The alien works of God lead to God's proper works. In a passage that seems to allude to baptism as described in Romans 6, Luther writes, "It's no good to drown; therefore we'll go through the water with the Christ, even though it looks again as though we would have to stay in it. . . . were the water never so deep we shall nevertheless go through it with Christ."¹ While suffering for the gospel is to be expected, one must not forget that Christ is present, and that because of Christ, the suffering is not the last word. It is not suffering that is glorified, but the One who brings us through the suffering.

Finally it should also be stressed that Luther understood Christian suffering--that suffering which was "acceptable," or at least expected--to take place within community. Suffering for the sake of the gospel occurs within a community, in a situation of solidarity: "we set out upon the road of suffering and death accompanied by the entire church."² In isolation, sufferings are self-chosen. Moreover, any suffering which attempts to isolate an individual from one's community is not helpful. The suffering which is God's alien work always provides for the presence of Christ. Here it is important to remember Luther's teaching on how, as the priesthood of all

¹ LW 51: 202-3; WA 32: 33.17-25 (Sermon on Cross and Suffering, 1530).

² LW 42: 163; WA 6: 132.14-15 (Fourteen Consolations, 1520).

believers, Christians are to be "Christs to one another."¹ This should involve being Christ's presence to one another in suffering.

C. Application to Church and Society

The theology of the cross also provides a hermeneutical principle that is applicable to church and society. While a carefully delineated methodology which strictly follows the methodology contained in the theology of the cross is not always present in every detail, various themes present in the theology of the cross can be clearly seen in his approach to the ecclesiastical and social issues which confronted him. This would suggest that Luther struggled throughout his lifetime to apply the basic teachings of the theology of the cross whenever he could. The cross was to be the test of everything, whether it be sacred or profane.

Basic to Luther's approach was his insistence that the true church is to be found in the midst of struggles, crosses and sufferings. That is where God has chosen to be revealed, even if the world despises them. In fact, Luther calls suffering and struggles one of the seven marks of the church.² Thus, he is critical whenever the church or the ecclesiastical authorities seek to avoid suffering and struggles, or when they refuse to enter into the very human world where suffering and struggles are the norm. A church which refuses to do this is a church apart from

¹ LW 31: 366ff; WA 7: 35ff (The Freedom of a Christian, 1520).

² LW 41: 164-5; WA 50: 641.35-642.7 (On the Councils and the Church, 1539). See also LW 1: 253; WA 42: 187.37, 188.7-13 (1535-1545 Genesis Commentary); LW 16: 299-300; WA 31/II: 220.32ff (Isaiah Commentary, 1527-1530); and LW 17: 186; WA 31/II: 407.31ff (Ibid.).

God.¹ The world may not recognize the true church hidden in suffering and struggle, however.

As Luther notes,

this church of Christ is extremely poor and wretched in appearance, since its poor, distressed, naked, imprisoned and dishonoured are the refuse of all and loathsome to all men for the sake of Christ's name.²

Here Luther reveals a type of God's preferential option for the marginalized or the overlooked of the world, even if he meant it primarily in a spiritual sense. God has chosen to be hidden and revealed precisely among those whom the world does not consider to be a part of the church or of any importance. Therefore the true church is to be found at the cross and with those who struggle and suffer. Luther thus fought against what he considered was a corrupt view of the church which justified its wealth and the princely way in which church authorities lived as signs of God's divine support. This was a blatant theology of glory.

The idea of the church as servant had disappeared. Confronted by this manifestation of a theology of glory, Luther stressed the need for the church to give up much of its power. One of the results of an emphasis on the priesthood of all believers was that it removed much of the power from the ecclesiastical hierarchy.³ The proposal to the Leisnig congregation, that they had the right to choose their own pastors, served the same goal.⁴ By giving congregations this

¹ LW 14: 304, 309; WA 5: 41.27ff., 45.22-23 (Psalm 1:6, Second Psalms Lectures, 1519-1521).

² LW 16: 300; WA 31/II: 222.6-9 (Isaiah Commentary, 1527-1530).

³ For Luther's description of the priesthood of all believers, see his 1520 treatise, "The Freedom of A Christian," LW 31: 354-6; WA 7: 27-8 (German text), WA 7:56-8 (Latin text); and LW 39: 229-38; WA 8: 247-54 (Dr. Luther's Retraction of the Error Forced Upon Him by the Most Highly Learned Priest of God, Sir Jerome Emser, Vicar of Meissen, 1521).

⁴ See here both LW 45: 159-175; WA 12: 11-15 (Ordinance of a Common Chest, 1523), which is Luther's preface to the Leisnig document, and the document itself, as found in LW 45: 176-194; WA 12: 18-30 (Fraternal Agreement on the Common Chest of the Entire Assembly at Leisnig, 1523).

right, beneficiaries were eliminated and the economic control by the ecclesiastical hierarchy was greatly reduced or even eliminated. The money that had gone out of the community now stayed, and it was to be used to care for the poor.

It was not only the church that was criticized for acting as lords rather than servants. The fledgling civil governments were also criticized by Luther. Their job was to care for the marginalized, not build empires of power on the backs of the poor.¹

Along with chastising the lordly attitudes among the church hierarchy and the princes and governments, Luther attempted to desacralize religion by emphasizing the Christ in our midst. Prenter notes, "The theology of the cross, according to Luther, demands the radical rejection of any division of the world into two realms--the sacred and the secular."² The false dichotomy between sacred and profane often led to a theology of glory, or a theology of ascent. In his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Luther criticizes the notion that to have a pure heart meant that a person would

run away from human society into a corner, a monastery, or a desert, neither thinking about the world nor concerning himself with worldly affairs and business, but amusing himself only with heavenly thoughts. By this delusive doctrine they have not only beguiled and dangerously deceived themselves and other people, but have committed the murderous crime of calling "profane" the act and stations which the world requires, and which, as a matter of fact, God Himself has ordained. . . . Whatever God has commanded cannot be profane Meanwhile [the sophists] are causing trouble with their own wandering thoughts and gaping as though they wanted to climb up to heaven and grope for God, until they break their own necks in the process.³

¹ For example, see his critique of the princes in LW 46: 22-3; WA 18: 299.3-14 (Admonition to Peace, 1525).

² Prenter, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 14.

³ LW 21: 32-3; WA 32: 324.15ff (Sermon on the Mount, 1521).

The theology of the cross as a hermeneutic can also be seen in the way Luther understood the sacraments. One of the reasons that Luther restricted the sacraments to two in this early polemical work is that only two of the sacraments—baptism and eucharist—specifically connect earthly elements to the divine promises.¹ This is significant for the simple reason that the use of earthly elements emphasized the "down-to-earth" nature of the sacraments. They are earthly symbols, and the sacraments are meant to strengthen believers so that they may continue to live on this earth with all its struggles and tribulations. He rejected the notion that only the non-physical things were of value in one's relationship with God. In one treatise on the sacraments, he wrote,

Our Fanatics, however, are full of fraud and humbug. They think that nothing spiritual can be present where there is anything material and physical, and assert that flesh is of no avail. Actually, the opposite is true; the Spirit cannot be with us except in material and physical things such as the Word, water, and Christ's body and in his saints on earth.²

Throughout his life Luther stressed that theology must be practical rather than speculative. In his mind, "an orthodoxy which is not also an *orthopraxis* would be inconceivable."³ One

¹ LW 36: 302-3; WA 11: 454.19-30 (The Adoration of the Sacrament, 1523); LW 36: 44-5; WA 6: 518.10-23 (The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, 1520). Luther argues that a sacrament must have three things; God's promise, a sign (i.e. earthly elements), and our trust in God's promises, for them to be fruitful "for us." See also the Small Catechism, in The Book of Concord, Theodore G. Tappert, trans. and ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 349, 352.

Oberman correctly notes, however, that humans also "need" some "earthly" sign when it comes to absolution. He writes, ". . . a Christian can only be promised absolution, the Word of Forgiveness, 'from outside'. He cannot trust his own conscience." Oberman, Luther, 226. Such a statements suggests that these things are from "without" or external to us (bread, wine, water, declarations of absolution, etc.) are crucial for faith.

² LW 37: 95; WA 23: 193.28-33 (That These Words of Christ, "This is my Body", etc, Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics, 1527). For another example of this stress on the physical, see his comment on baptism by immersion in LW 36: 68; WA 6: 534.28-30 (Babylonian Captivity of the Church, 1520).

³ Lienhard, Luther: Witness to Jesus Christ, 137.

criticism of the scholastic's speculative theology was that it was theoretical rather than in touch with human reality. One of the ways to "measure" the practicality of theology was to look at its fruits. Thus, Luther attacked indulgences as they were preached by Tetzel because they preyed on people's fears and took away necessary financial resources from the people. In his eyes, therefore, not only was Tetzel's approach to preaching indulgences *theologically* wrong, it was also wrong morally and practically.¹ The abusive preaching of indulgences, as reflected in Tetzel, was considered by Luther to be nothing more than cheap offers of human built ladders meant to assist a person in their climb into heaven, while ignoring the suffering and struggles of one's neighbours.

A second example of Luther's attempts at a practical application of the theology of the cross is found in his treatise on "Whether One May Flee From a Deadly Plague."² His argument here is threefold: first, it is to be remembered that God is in the midst of those who are suffering. Second, suffering is a fact of life. For Luther, this did not mean that people should ignore common-sense health procedures, but that it was wrong to flee from the plague if the only reason for doing so was to protect themselves at the cost of helping others who rely on you. Third, in this treatise he repeatedly stresses the importance of solidarity; of caring for one's neighbours to whom we are bound, and with whom Christ has chosen to dwell. In each of these arguments, the hermeneutical principles of the theology of the cross are clearly reflected.

A final example of Luther's attempts at a practical application of the theology of the cross is found in his "Treatise on Trade and Usury." Here one finds many of the themes which he had

¹ Luther raises some very practical questions about indulgences, especially in theses 43-46, 50, 51, and 86 in his *Ninety Five Theses* (1517), LW 31: 29-33; WA 1: 235-237, and in the *Explanation to the Ninety Five Theses* (1518), LW 31: 199-200; WA 1: 598.21-39.

² LW 43: 119-38; WA 23: 339-79 (1527).

developed in his theology of the cross coming to bear on specific socio-economic issues. Not only usury, but the whole economic system came under scrutiny. The practice of charging as much as the market would bear is attacked because, among other things, it gave the seller the impression that he or she "were a god and beholden to no one."¹ Standing surety is likewise condemned, for it is "a presumptuous encroachment upon the work of God. In the first place, Scripture commands us not to put our trust and reliance in any man, but in God alone."² Luther felt that both usury and selling as high as the market would bear put too much power and control into the hands of individuals, giving them the impression that they were *apfelgotts* in relation to other people.³ His lengthy critique of trade and usury also implies that he would like to see an inversion or reversal in commercial practices, whereby people would respect their neighbours and charge only what they thought was fair.⁴ Luther even brings in the theme of security (which he had earlier linked to a theology of glory), by suggesting that the present trade and commerce practices revealed the human desire to obtain security for themselves rather than trusting in God alone.⁵ In rejecting usury and lending practices, Luther turns to Aristotle, who argues that money does not--or should not--produce money.⁶

¹ LW 45: 248; WA 15: 295.24 (Treatise on Trade and Usury, 1524).

² LW 45: 253; WA 15: 299.2-4 (Ibid.).

³ WA 31/I: 234.3; LW 14: 14 (Lecture on Psalm 117, 1530); Edward Sittler, who translated this section of LW, translates *Apfel konige* as "Plaster Kings." See also LW 21: 12; WA 32: 306.36-7 (Sermon on the Magnificat, 1521).

⁴ LW 45: 248; WA 15: 295.20-22 (Treatise on Trade and Usury, 1524).

⁵ LW 45: 260; WA 15: 304.2-5 (Ibid.).

⁶ LW 45: 233 (Introduction to the treatise "On Trade and Usury"). Aristotle's comments are found in the "Nicomachean Ethics," Book V, 5, 1133ab, and "Politics," Book I, 10, 1258ab, The Basic Works of Aristotle, Richard McKeon, ed. (New York: Random House, 1941).

Inherent in the trade and commerce practices of his time was what Luther considered a rejection of solidarity with other human beings. In the policy of charging as much as the market would bear, Luther perceived the destruction of community for the sake of the gains of an individual. He addresses this issue by stating:

Thus occasion is given for avarice, and every window and door to hell is opened. What else does this mean but this: I care nothing for my neighbour, so long as I have my profit and satisfy my greed, of what concern is it to me if it injures my neighbour in ten ways at once? There you see how shamelessly this maxim flies squarely in the face not only of Christian love but also of natural law. How can there be anything good then in trade? How can it be without sin when such injustice is the chief maxim and rule of the whole business? On such a basis trade can be nothing but robbing and stealing the property of others.¹

While Luther censures trading and commercial practices for basically encouraging people to act like gods even if it means that the community is destroyed, he also reveals a connection between the methodology of the theology of the cross and that of natural and even Christian law. The call for solidarity and community, as well as the need to deal honestly with society, are themes common to both.² Both the theology of the cross and natural law call upon all people (not just Christians!) to criticize society whenever people are marginalized, isolated, or treated as less than—or more than—human. Both a theology of the cross and natural law have as principles the right and even the duty to call a thing what it is. It is part of their nature to denounce injustice and the mistreatment, abuse, or the taking advantage of others by those who have power or authority over others.

¹ LW 45: 247-8; WA 45: 294.26-295.3 (Treatise on Trade and Usury, 1524). See also the excellent article by Richard P. Hordern, "Luther's Attitude Towards Poverty: Theology and Social Reform", *Festschrift: A Tribute to Dr. William Hordern*, Walter Freitag, ed. (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan Press, 1985), 94-108.

² Luther's Small and Large Catechisms reflect, to a large degree, these similarities.

In summary, the methodology inherent in a theology of the cross plants humanity squarely in the midst of this world, the very place where God's clearest self-revelation takes place. This methodology of the theology of the cross also has close parallels with the approach inherent in natural law. With its focus on dealing with the realities of this world, human beings are called not only to treat each other fairly and deal with each other honestly, but to enter into a solidarity with one another and to actively look out for the best interests of one another.¹ This solidarity is a matter of no longer being "curved in upon oneself,"² but rather, of seeking the incarnate Christ hidden in the midst of those who struggle and suffer, those who are marginalized by a theology of glory.

IV. CONCLUSION

The theology of the cross, as Luther explained it, has both a Christological and a methodological aspect to it. Taking as its starting point the Incarnation, where God has chosen to be hidden from the view of speculative theologians (theologians of glory), the theology of the cross points constantly to a "down-to-earth" God. It is this God in our midst who acts to save us, by being in solidarity with us, even to the extent of Christ exchanging his righteousness for our sinfulness. Christ does not escape from the cross, but goes through death in order that we might have life. The darkness is not avoided but faced head on. The cross also reveals that God

¹ Luther's comments on the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer bring out this theme that justice involves not only refraining from doing evil, but also actively helping out others. Cf. Luther's Large Catechism, The Book of Concord, 390-99, 430-36.

² LW 25: 245; WA 56: 258.28 (1515-1516 Romans Commentary), *et passim*.

acts for us. God does more than dwell with us through Christ. God also acts decisively for us, to give us that righteousness which we cannot obtain.

The theology of the cross is also a methodology. As such, Luther used it to address the issues that confronted him. His operating principle was to start with the Christ in our midst, the one who suffered and died. The cross and sufferings of Christ are where God has chosen to be revealed. This revelation involves a challenge to how we perceive reality, and in particular, our view of what it means to be human. For Luther, the theology of the cross criticizes any attempt to ignore the way in which God has chosen to be revealed to us. It thus emphasized the *potentia Dei ordinata*, rather than the *potentia Dei absoluta*, which Luther associated with the theologians of glory, who sought to glimpse or speculate about what God is like in heaven. The problem with a theology of glory was that humans want to climb this ladder into heaven trying to be God (or at least like God), while ignoring their humanness. This attempt to escape from the world is reflected in the separation of the sacred from the profane, and in an ignoring of one's neighbours. Yet God has chosen to "hide" in this earth, so that only by faith and trust will one discover that one's neighbour may be the Christ in our midst. The reality of human life is that it involves struggles, suffering, death and darkness. As with Christ, the cross and struggles of life cannot be avoided. They are a consequence of entrusting one's life to God rather than a means to be justified in the presence of God. Furthermore, the theology of the cross reminds one that only by going through death can the resurrection be reached. Thus, the theology of the cross calls for us to focus on the Christ hidden in our midst, to deal with the reality of what it means to be human rather than trying to be gods, and it stresses the importance of solidarity with those who are in the midst of struggles and oppression.

CHAPTER THREE

LUTHER AND THE PEASANTS' WAR: A CASE STUDY OF THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

I. INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the content and the methodology inherent in Luther's theology of the cross was examined from a theoretical perspective. A brief examination of some of the political, economic and social issues revealed that certain aspects of the theology of the cross are to be found in his writings. However, what is still lacking is a case study of one crucial event in his life and in the life of his society: the Peasants' War. While this tragic event has generally not painted Luther in a favourable light, it should provide a good test of how practical or helpful a theology of the cross might actually be within the context of a specific social, political and economic context.

While the German Peasants' War of 1525 does provide an excellent case study for evaluating Luther's theology of the cross, nevertheless any study of this event is fraught with complex difficulties. One is faced with a limited number of source materials and a great abundance of secondary literature which covers a very broad spectrum of interpretations. Even the title itself is misleading. As Heiko Oberman correctly points out, the German peasants' war of 1525 was not limited to Germany, the peasants, or to 1525.¹ He goes on to suggest that it

¹ Heiko A. Oberman, "The Gospel of Social Unrest: 450 Years After the So-Called "German Peasants' War of 1525," Harvard Theological Review 69 (1976), 103.

was not a war, but rather an uprising of social unrest (*tumultus rusticorum*). But when over 100,000 people are killed or, more precisely, slaughtered, the titles of "war" or even "massacre" are more accurate descriptions.¹

The cause of the Peasants' war is also a debated question. Scholars have suggested that the origins of this tumult could be political,² socio-economic,³ a combination of these two,⁴ or

¹ The terms "slaughter" or "massacre" are apt descriptions of this event, since almost all of the people killed in the Peasants' war were peasants. For reference to the number of people killed in this war, see the introduction to the "Open Letter on the Harsh Book Against the Peasants," as found in LW 46: 59. See also Geoffrey R. Elton, Reformation Europe, 1517-1559 (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1964), 59.

² See here the approach taken by Günther Franz, Der deutsche Bauernkrieg (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1987). Franz argues that the Peasants' War was essentially a political struggle between princes and peasants, fought mainly over taxes and the imposition of seigniorial law (*Herrschaftrecht*) to support tenure or servitude. The peasants, on the other hand, wanted to drop these laws in favour of either the traditional law (*altes Recht*) or divine law (*göttliches Recht*). For an overview of the research on the peasants' war, see Robert W. Scribner, "The German Peasants' War," Reformation Europe: A Guide to Research, Steven Ozment, ed. (St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1982), 107-133.

³ Many of the socio-economic approaches to the Peasants' War have come from a Marxist perspective, which sees in the uprising an "early bourgeois revolution." One of the reasons for the interest in this event by scholars of the former German Democratic Republic was that such an interpretation would allow them to claim the first "people's revolution." Oberman, "Gospel of Social Unrest," 104. Standard works to consult here are Frederick Engels, The Peasant War in Germany (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956); Max Steinmetz, Deutschland von 1476 bis 1648 (Berlin: VEB Deutschen Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1978); Idem, "Forschungen zur Geschichte der deutschen frühbürgerlichen Revolution," Historische Forschung in der DDR 1970-1980 (Berlin: VEB Deutsche Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1980); Abraham Friesen, "The Marxist Interpretation of the Reformation," Archiv für Reformationgeschichte 64 (1973), 34-54. This Marxist approach, however, leaves itself open to the charge that it interprets the events of the peasants' revolt according to a predisposed theory, rather than its actual context.

⁴ The main proponents of this approach are Peter Blickle, The Revolution of 1525: The German Peasants' War From a New Perspective, Thomas A. Brady, Jr. and H.C. Erik Midelfort, trans. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), and Tom Scott, "The Peasants' War: a Historiographical Review," The Historical Journal 22 (1979), 140-68.

theological.¹ The situation was further confused from the very outset with all the anti-Lutheran, anti-Müntzer and anti-catholic sentiment that developed at the very beginning over the war.² Nor has the relationship between the "Reformation" and the "Revolution" been satisfactorily explained. Did the reformation lead to the revolution (the peasants' war), where Luther was one of the early revolutionary leaders who later betrayed the cause?³ Or was Luther's reformation

¹ For example, Henry J. Cohn, in his article, "Anticlericalism in the German Peasants' War, 1525," Past and Present 83 (1979), 3-31, stresses the bitterness of the peasants to the ecclesiastical courts, who were in large measure responsible for their economic burdens. Martin Brecht goes so far as to suggest that the "12 Articles," which was one of the basic listing of grievances of the peasants, were more theological in nature than political. Brecht, "Der theologische Hintergrund der Zwölf Artikel der Bauernschaft in Schwaben von 1525," Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte 85 (1974), 174-208. Oberman also supports this view. He suggests that Erasmus blamed the unrest on the monastic exploitation of the peasants; that Margrave Philip's ambassador saw the 12 articles as primarily aimed against the church, and that Christoph Schappeler also interpreted the uprising in theological terms. Oberman, "The Gospel of Social Unrest," 114-20. This approach, however, seems to be too simplistic, simply because it is impossible to determine one main reason for the peasants' war. While theological themes can be found in the complaints, they are not the only source of discontent. Merely "prooftexting" with Scripture references the *Twelve Articles*, for example, does not imply that at the heart of the peasants' complaints were theological. Even Luther does not consider the peasants' unrest as theological--as will be seen below.

² For a sample of the rhetoric and finger pointing, both before and after the massacre of May 15, 1525, see Eric W. Gritsch, "Martin Luther and the Revolutionary Tradition of the West," Encounters with Luther: Lectures, Discussions and Sermons at the Martin Luther Colloquium, 2 Vols. Eric W. Gritsch, ed. (Gettysburg: Lutheran Theological Seminary, 1980), vol. 1, pp. 9, 18.

³ Gerhard Brendler reflects this Marxist view of Luther, alluding to the imagery of Luther as the "John the Baptist" who prepared the way for Müntzer. Brendler, Martin Luther: Theology & Revolution, Claude R. Foster, Jr., trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 275. See also 114-5, 131. Marxists and others suggest that Luther originally encouraged and supported the revolution, but later lost his courage and defected to the side of the princes. Cf. Friesen, "The Marxist Interpretation of the Reformation," 39-40.

Engels also suggests that Luther's critique of the ecclesiastical establishment which had exploited the peasants, and his placing the scriptures into the hands of the plebian movement, whereby the people could see for themselves the contrast between the feudalized Christianity of his day and the early communal Christianity, pushed him into the forefront of the revolution. But as soon as the peasants started using these weapons which Luther had provided, he turned
(continued...)

only one of many catalysts for the revolutionary movements sweeping through Germany?¹ One needs a very steady hand to cut through all the rhetoric and theories applied to the peasants' war in order to come into contact with the war itself.

The task is not at all simplified by limiting oneself only to a study of Luther's role in the Peasants' war. The fact that many of the later editions of Luther's collected writings omit his strong attacks on the princes does not help the situation.² Moreover, as Ernst Wolf argues, an accurate understanding of Luther's social ideas has never recovered from the poor treatment Luther received at the hands of "the numerous representatives of the false guides of the 'Luther renaissance'."³ A few scholars have seen in Luther's writings deliberate calls for vast socio-

³(...continued)

against them. Thus, Luther ends up as no more than a "burgher reformist." Engels, The Peasant War in Germany, 44, 67. M. M. Smirin suggests that Luther first raised the banner of the people's reformation, but when he saw the revolutionary implications of what he had done, he left them and became the ideologue of the princes. Thus, there is "die Fürstenreformation Luthers" and "die Volksreformation Müntzers." Smirin, Die Volksreformation des Thomas Münzer und der grosse Bauernkrieg (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1956), 66-7. Brendler, however, questions this portrayal of Luther as a "lackey of the princes," suggesting that such an approach is much too simplistic. Brendler, Martin Luther: Theology and Revolution, 319.

¹ Bensing and Hoyer state, for example, that "The great antifeudal movement of the masses of the people, which culminated in the Peasants' War, and the Lutheran Reformation both arose only in the mutual recognition that the whole nation was in a crisis; yet they merged together as movements only temporarily." Manfred Bensing and Siegfried Hoyer, Der deutsche Bauernkrieg 1524-1526 (Berlin: Militärverlag der DDR, 1987), 14. The temporary alliance of the movements ends in 1521-1522 when the conservative camp goes with Luther, while the radical camp goes with Müntzer. *Ibid.*, 53ff.

Oberman suggests that Luther's reformation was merely a catalyst or "accelerator" of the social unrest, not its source. This is supported by the fact that social unrest, such as the "Poor Conrad" movement around 1515-1516, and the "*Bundschuh*" uprisings happened before the reformation movement had begun. Oberman, "The Gospel of Social Unrest," 105.

² Lewis W. Spitz, "The Christian in Church and State," Martin Luther and the Modern Mind: Freedom, Conscience, Toleration, Rights, Toronto Studies in Theology, Volume 22. Manfred Hoffmann, ed. (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), 127.

³ Ernst Wolf, Peregrinatio, 2 Volumes. Studien zur reformatorische Theologie, zum Kirchenrecht und zur Sozialethik (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1965), vol. 2, p. 82.

political reforms, while a majority feel that this was not his intention at all.¹ Luther's *Also Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Other Peasants*,² written in the midst of the unrest and containing a harsh vindictive judgement against the peasants, also colours one's approach to the war.

Methodological and theological issues also complicate the study of Luther's role in the war. From which theological or methodological perspective should the war be viewed? While the two-realms theory is the standard theological approach, this theory is complicated by the fact that scholars do not agree on what exactly this theory is.³ As Ebeling explains it, "the doctrine

¹ Günter Mühlpfordt argues that Luther's "To the Christian Nobility" aims at such reforms in his work, "Der frühe Luther als Autorität der Radikalen. Zum Luther-Erbe des linken Flügels," Weltwirkung der Reformation. Internationales Symposium anlässlich der 450-Jahr-Feier der Reformation in Wittenberg von 24 bis 26 Oktober, 1967. Referate und Diskussion. Max Steinmetz and Gerhard Brendler, eds. 2 Volumes (Berlin: VEB Deutschen Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1969), vol. 1, 213. This approach is critiqued by Leif Grane, "Thomas Müntzer und Martin Luther," Bauernkriegs-Studien, Bernd Moeller, ed. Schriften des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 189, 82.2 and 83. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus [Gerd Mohr], 1975), 84ff.

² LW 46:49-55; WA 18:357-361 (May, 1525).

³ Some of the best studies on the two-realms theory in Luther are: Paul Althaus, "Luthers Lehre von die beiden Reichen im Feuer der Kritik," Lutherjahrbuch 24 (1957), 40-68; Heinrich Bornkamm, Luther's Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms in the Context of His Theology, Karl H. Hertz, trans. Facet Books Social Ethics Series - 14 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966); F. Edward Cranz, An Essay on the Development of Luther's Thought on Justice, Law, and Society, Harvard Theological Studies XIX (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959); Ulrich Duchrow, ed. Lutheran Churches - Salt or Mirror of Society? Case Studies on the Theory and Practice of the Two Kingdoms Doctrine (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, Department of Studies, 1988); Gerhard Ebeling, "The Necessity of the Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," Word and Faith, James W. Leitch, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 386-406; Eric W. Gritsch, "Christ and Caesar," Martin - God's Court Jester: Luther in Retrospect (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 111-29; Franz Lau, Luthers Lehre von den beiden Reichen, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1953); and W.D.J. Cargill Thompson, The Political Thought of Martin Luther, Philip Broadhead, ed. (Totowa, New Jersey: Barnes and Noble Books; and Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1984). Unfortunately, Cargill Thompson died before he added the footnotes to his work.

of the two kingdoms cannot be represented in a diagram. The relationship is one of movement, activity, and conflict."¹ It is not simply a division between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil,² for that would give complete autonomy to the secular realm.³ One advantage of this theory is that it takes into consideration Luther's stress on justification. This is crucial for anyone who stands in the presence of God (*coram Deo*): but it also allows Luther to talk about a "civil righteousness," based on one's standing before humanity (*coram hominibus*) or the world (*coram mundo*).⁴ Because of the fluidity and complexity of the two-realms theory, however, it comes as no surprise that scholars have used it to justify the support of tyrants and, on the other extreme, to actively resist tyranny.⁵ In theological terms, this theory raises the question as to whether Christians in society can "sin boldly" and do whatever they want,⁶ since they are not

¹ Gerhard Ebeling, Luther: An Introduction to his Thought, R. A. Wilson, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 177. Interestingly enough, Duchrow does attempt to put this theory into a diagram, in Lutheran Churches - Salt or Mirror of Society?, 6-7.

² As suggested by Johannes Heckel, Lex charitatis. Eine juristische Untersuchung über das Recht in der Theologie Martin Luthers, Second revised edition (Munich: Bohlau, 1953).

³ Reinhold Seeberg, Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte 4th ed., 5 Vols. (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1933), vol. 4/1, 340-41.

⁴ Luther distinguishes between these two types of righteousness in his "Sermon on Double Righteousness," of 1519 (LW 31: 297-306; WA 2: 145-52) and in a sermon he preached on October 5, 1529 (WA 29: 565.2). See also Craz's discussion, Luther on Justice, Law, and Society, 73-93.

⁵ Duchrow gives an excellent overview of the various attempts at applying the two-realms theory to various political situations in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Duchrow, Lutheran Churches - Salt or Mirror of Society?, 290-318.

⁶ Luther's admonition to Melanchthon to "sin boldly" has often been used to justify self-gratification and the rejection of moral standards. This interpretation, however, is definitely not what Luther meant! Rather, Luther was advising Melanchthon to act, rather than be paralysed into inaction. To act was to proceed in faith. As the full quote says, "sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly." LW 48: 282; WABr 2: 372.84-5 (Letter to Melanchthon, August 1, 1521).

under the rule of secular authorities, or whether they must give total obedience to their rulers who are instituted by God.

Another possible approach to take in discussing Luther's theological approach to the Peasants' war is from the perspective of his theology of the cross.¹ This would seem to be an appropriate approach, in light of Luther's injunction that "the Cross tests everything."² This methodological approach, however, would seem doomed to failure if Moltmann is correct in arguing that Luther did not have a *political* theology of the cross; nor did he

formulate [the *theologia crucis*] as social criticism against feudal society in the Peasant Wars of 1524 and 1525. What he wrote did not express the critical and liberating force of the cross, the choosing of the lowly which puts the mighty to shame, not the polemic of the crucified God against pride and subjection, domination and slavery, but instead a non-Protestant mysticism of suffering and humble submission.³

Moltmann goes on to state that it was Müntzer, and not Luther, who in the end develops a political theology of the cross in his social reforms and involvement in the Peasants' war.⁴ It would appear crucial, therefore, to explore whether or not Luther followed the main points of his theology of the cross in his approach to the war. Is Moltmann right in his assessment, or has

¹ Del Pino deals with this approach briefly in an excursus, but he does not approach it from the perspective of both the methodology and Christology of the theology of the cross. Jerome King Del Pino, "Luther's Theology of the Cross as Reflected in Selected Historical Texts of Social Change from 1521-1525: A Study of Theory and Practice in the Early Years of the Reformation," Ph.D. Dissertation. (Boston: Boston University Graduate School, 1980), 253-264.

² "Crux probat omnia." WA 5: 179.31 (Second Psalms Commentary, 1519-1521).

³ Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology, R. A. Wilson and John Bowden, trans. (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 72. For a critique of Moltmann's charge that Luther espoused a "non-Protestant mysticism," see the first chapter on the antecedents of Luther's theology of the cross. Bengt Hoffman's work, Luther and the Mystics, is especially helpful in dispelling this myth.

⁴ Moltmann, "Reformation and Revolution," Martin Luther and the Modern Mind: Freedom, Conscience, Toleration, Rights, Manfred Hoffmann, ed. Toronto Studies in Theology Volume 22 (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1985), 171.

he misinterpreted Luther's theology of the cross at this point? The answer one gives to this question will also affect one's understanding of the relationship between Luther and social reform as a whole.

To address this question which Moltmann raises, the main themes of the writings which Luther wrote in connection to the Peasants' war will be briefly summarized and then examined in light of both the method and the content of Luther's *theologia crucis*. For purposes of this study, only Luther's writings to the end of 1525 will be studied, since there are some subtle but significant changes which occur later in his life.¹ Following this examination, Moltmann's critique of Luther's application of the theology of the cross to the political and social realms will be addressed.

¹ For example, when confronted with the German constitution by Elector John of Saxony, Luther reluctantly agreed that armed resistance against the emperor was justifiable in cases of self defense, and that princes were to protect themselves against the unlawful attacks of the emperor when he went beyond the limitations of his office. For the text of the lawyer's statements, see St.L. 10: 558-561. In a significant statement dated October 1530, written in the name of Luther, Jonas, Melancthon, Spalatin, and other theologians, it states, "...in previously teaching that resistance to governmental authorities is altogether forbidden, we were unaware that this right has been granted by the government's own laws, which we have diligently taught are to be obeyed at all times." St.L. 10: 562-3; LW 49: 432-33; WABr 5: 662.17-19 (no. 1740. October, 1530). See also LW 47: 8 (Introduction to "Dr. Martin Luther's Warning to the Dear German People," 1531). For a similar discussion nearly 10 years later, see WA 39/II: 44.8-13; 50.22-51.7 (Disputation Concerning the Right to Resist the Emperor, 1539).

II. LUTHER'S WRITINGS ON THE PEASANTS' WAR

There are three treatises in which Luther directly addresses issues arising from his connection with the peasants' war that erupted in nearby Thuringia:¹ *The Admonition to Peace: A Reply to the Twelve Articles of the Peasants in Swabia*, written between April 16 and May 6 of 1525, while he was on a journey through Thuringia;² the vicious *Also Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Other Peasants*, written immediately upon returning to Wittenberg on May 6th;³ and finally, *An Open Letter on the Harsh Book Against the Peasants*, written in mid-July, two months after the Frankenhausen uprising had been put down.⁴ While these treatises clearly reveal many of Luther's opinions about the grievances, they did not, in themselves, play an influential or determinative role in the war. The first treatise came too late to be seriously considered by the Thuringian peasants, who were already involved in sporadic outbreaks of violence. The second treatise was written before the massacre in Frankenhausen on May 15th, but not published until afterwards. Obviously, this advice came much too late. Luther's infamous lines in this treatise, calling on the princes to "smite, slay and stab," were likely

¹ It must be remembered that Luther's contact with--and reactions to--the peasants' revolt was basically limited to the struggles in Thuringia. It was this region which Luther travelled through in April and May of 1525, and this was also the region in which Müntzer was active. Some of the bitterness Luther has towards the peasants in his later writings of 1525 may be partly attributed to the poor, and at times even hostile, reception he received on this journey, and also to his strong dislike of Müntzer.

² LW 46: 17-43; WA 18: 291-334. These Twelve Articles are found in LW 46: 8-16. While this was not the only list of grievances put forth by the peasants, it is one of the more popular ones. Furthermore, it is the list that Luther responded to at the request of the peasants.

³ LW 46: 49-55; WA 18: 357-361.

⁴ LW 46: 63-85; WA 18: 384-401.

directed only at the peasant leaders not willing to negotiate, and not to the peasant population as a whole, as is so often suggested.¹ While this does not justify what Luther said, in his defense one must say that this treatise has consistently been taken out of context, with disastrous results for any attempt at understanding Luther's view of the peasants' war.

The Admonition to Peace contains Luther's response to the *Twelve Articles*. This treatise provides a good summary of Luther's thoughts about the war, and its ideas are echoed in the other two treatises.² The *Twelve Articles*, published some time in January or February of 1525

¹ Three factors suggest such an interpretation. First, after a general address to the peasants in "The Admonition to Peace," challenging them to follow the "Christian law," the cross and suffering, Luther attacks the "false prophets" who have deceived the peasants by suggesting that revolt is acceptable to God. It was these "false prophets" that were the object of Luther's scorn, not the peasants in general. As Bornkamm notes, these false prophets "summoned the peasants to violence in the name of Christ and of Christian liberty." Bornkamm, *Luther in Mid Career*, E. Theodore Bachmann, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 367. Second, the title of the second treatise includes the words "Also" and "Other," indicating a relationship to the first treatise, "Admonition to Peace," with which it was originally published. The title, therefore clearly reveals that it addressed only the peasants who did not want to listen to Luther's advice in the first treatise. Luther carefully distinguished among them. For the significance of the words "Also" and "Other" in the title of the second treatise, see Hubert Kirchner, *Luther and the Peasant's War*, Darrell Jodock, trans. Facet Books Historical Series - 22 (Reformation), Charles S. Anderson, gen. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 10-11; and Mark U. Edwards, Jr., "The Peasants' War," *Luther and the False Brethren* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 64-5.

Third, this idea of Luther's harsh words being directed only to the peasant "ringleaders" is further supported in his third treatise, "An Open Letter on the Harsh Book Against the Peasants." Luther states that if his advice had been followed, and "a peasant or a hundred of them had been knocked down so that the rest would have tripped over them, and if they had not been allowed to get the upper hand, many thousands of them who now have to hide would have been saved, for they would have stayed at home. That would have been a necessary act of mercy that could have been performed with little wrath..." LW 46: 75; WA 18: 393.27-31. The implication is that if the princes had acted quickly by dealing quickly and harshly with the peasant leaders who did not want to negotiate, then a general revolt could be avoided. Again, it must be stressed that these harsh words in question were written *before* the general uprising broke out May 15.

² Heinrich Bornkamm, among others, notes this continuity in his work, *Luther in Mid-Career*, 378-79.

in the region of Memmingen, was a list of twelve grievances put forth by the peasants and directed at the princes and lords. One reason for Luther's response was to correct those who might misunderstand the gospel.¹

A second reason was that in an unnamed document, the peasants list Luther as one of the people they would be willing to appeal to for counsel.² A third reason was that Luther hoped that by his intervention, negotiations would take place, and bloodshed avoided.³ The Weingarten Treaty of April 17th had shown that this could be done. In fact, Luther considered this treaty so important that he had it reprinted in the beginning of May, adding a preface and epilogue.⁴

¹ Edwards, "The Peasants' War," 60. Edwards also suggests that Luther replied in order to distance himself from the peasants. This assumption is, however, questionable. More likely Luther wanted to clarify the understanding of the gospel, and to separate himself only from those who would attempt to use the gospel as a pretext for rebellion, as Erasmus' friend Amerbach contends. Die Amerbachkorrespondenz, 9 Volumes, Alfred Hartmann, ed. Die Briefe aus den Jahren 1525-1530 (Basel: Verlag der Universitätsbibliothek, 1947), vol. 3, 18.44-54 (Letter of April 28, 1525 to Alciato in Basel).

While Oberman dismisses the idea that many of the peasant leaders used the gospel as a pretext for rebellion ("The Gospel of Social Unrest," 120-23), his view is tenuous. Luther himself suggests the peasants used the gospel as a pretext. LW 46: 33; WA 18: 318.20-21 (Admonition to Peace, 1525); see also LW 46: 51; WA 18: 358.33-359.11 (Against the Robbing and Murdering Hordes of Peasants, 1525). Oberman's rationale for this is his interpretation of the peasants' revolt as a religious uprising. Hillerbrand, however, based on a compilation of grievances from the period, suggests otherwise. Hillerbrand, "The German Reformation and the Peasants' War," The Social History of the Reformation, Lawrence P. Buck and Jonathan W. Zophy, eds. (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1972), 123-25.

² LW 46: 17, 40; WA 18: 291.27-292.24, 328.27-8 (Admonition to Peace, 1525).

³ Brendler, however, reflecting his bias to a marxist approach, suggests that "no one would really take his advice because class wars are not settled by arbitrators, and certainly not when the opponents are already in the field." Brendler, Martin Luther: Theology & Revolution, 286. Brendler too quickly dismisses the idea of effective negotiation and its importance for Luther.

⁴ WA 18: 336-43. See also Hubert Kirchner, Luther and the Peasants' War, 8-9. It is doubtful, however, whether Luther knew that George Truchsess of Waldberg, commander of the Swabian League army, had only negotiated this treaty as a way to trick the peasants into laying down their arms and returning home. Truchsess attacked the peasants as soon as they had done so. Cf. Brendler, Martin Luther: Theology & Revolution, 287.

In *The Admonition to Peace*, Luther begins by addressing the princes. He bluntly tells them that they have brought this unrest upon themselves, and accuses them of "ranting and raving" against the gospel. Furthermore, "as temporal rulers you do nothing but cheat and rob the people so that you may lead a life of luxury and extravagance. The common people cannot bear it any longer."¹ Moreover, "rulers are not appointed to exploit their subjects for their own profit and advantage, but to be concerned about the welfare of their subjects."² From a theological perspective, Luther felt that "it is not the peasants, dear lords, who are resisting you, it is God himself."³ He concludes by criticizing the princes for taxing the peasants mercilessly and then using this money for their own luxuries;

What good would it do a peasant if his field bore as many gulden as stalks of wheat if the rulers only taxed him all the more and then wasted it as though it were chaff to increase their luxury, and squandered his money on their own clothes, food, drink, and buildings? Would not the luxury and the extravagant spending have to be checked so that a poor man could keep something for himself? You have undoubtedly received further information from the peasants' tracts, so you are adequately aware of their grievances.⁴

Luther then turns his attention to the peasants. While they have many justified complaints, he insists that they should not claim to be a "Christian" association: there was nothing specifically Christian about the *Twelve Articles*.⁵ The gospel deals with one's standing in the presence of God, while the *Twelve Articles* deal with one's standing before other humans. Luther felt that the peasants had not rightly distinguished between the Christian law of the gospel and

¹ LW 46:19; WA 18: 293.31-5 (*Admonition to Peace*, 1525).

² LW 46: 22-3; WA 18: 299.22-4 (*Ibid.*).

³ LW 46: 20; WA 18: 295.22-3 (*Ibid.*).

⁴ LW 46: 23; WA 18: 299.25-30 (*Ibid.*).

⁵ LW 46: 24; WA 18: 301.14ff (*Ibid.*). While this critique is obviously central for Luther, he also suggests that the articles reflect the peasants' own interests and selfishness.

the natural or "divine" law: "Even though they [the *Twelve Articles*] all were just and equitable in terms of natural law, you have still forgotten the Christian law."¹ He summarizes the Christian law in these words; "Suffering! Suffering! Cross! Cross! This and nothing else is the Christian law."² Christian law tells us to give up our cloak as well as our coats, instead of trying to recover them.³ Following the example of Christ, people are not to use force to obtain justice for oneself; rather, they should entrust themselves to God. As he states,

Christians do not fight for themselves with sword and musket, but with the cross and with suffering, just as Christ, our leader, does not bear a sword, but hangs on the cross. Your victory, therefore, does not consist in conquering and reigning or in the use of force, but in defeat and in weakness.⁴

The reign of God will not come about by force, but only by trusting God.⁵ On the other hand, the temporal authorities, ruling on God's behalf, are to ensure that justice is done; that the "coats" be returned to their rightful owners. These issues should be dealt with by lawyers, rather than theologians.⁶

In his admonitions to the peasants, some important points emerge. First, Luther notes the legitimacy of the temporal authority of the princes. He felt that to rebel against them, even if they are wicked, is to blatantly disregard the Word of God.⁷ Second, to take authority from

¹ LW 46: 34; WA 18: 319.26-9 (Admonition to Peace, 1525).

² LW 46: 29; WA 18: 310.28-9 (Ibid.).

³ LW 46: 28; WA 18: 309.23 (Ibid.).

⁴ LW 46: 32; WA 18: 315.29-34 (Ibid.).

⁵ LW 46: 29; WA 18: 310.21ff (Ibid.).

⁶ LW 46: 39; WA 18: 327.28-31 (Ibid.).

⁷ To support this, Luther refers to Romans 13:1-2 and other similar passages. While he insists, up to and including the time of the peasants' revolt, that temporal authority is always to
(continued...)

the princes is akin to robbing them--breaking the seventh commandment.¹ Third, to usurp their authority could lead to anarchy, where everyone claims the right to judge each other, and no one listens to anyone else.² Before proceeding any further, therefore, the peasants should think about the consequences of their actions. Fourth, Luther attacks their use of Scripture: often the interpretations are allegorical, other times they are unrelated to the argument they are making, while in still other situations the actual scripture passages which they rely upon have the totally opposite meaning of what they suggest.³ Fifth, he reminds the peasants of the maxim that no one may sit as a judge on their own case, and avenge themselves.⁴ Instead, they should commit themselves and their cause to God in prayer, asking that God's will be done. Finally, Luther briefly addresses the actual contents of the first three articles.⁵ While he agrees in principle with the intent of the first article regarding the freedom to choose pastors,⁶ Luther makes the point that to arbitrarily deprive the princes of their tithe to pay for the pastor is to spend money that is not theirs. Therefore it is robbery.

⁷(...continued)

be obeyed, later in life he comes to accept the right of Christians in society to revolt in certain limited circumstances. He does so, however, with great reluctance.

¹ LW 46: 26; WA 18: 305.27ff (Admonition to Peace, 1525).

² LW 46: 27; WA 18: 306.24ff (Ibid.).

³ LW 46: 28-30; WA 18: 308-313 (Ibid.). See also Bornkamm, Luther in Mid Career, 357.

⁴ LW 46: 25; WA 18: 303.34-304.19 (Ibid.).

⁵ LW 46: 37-9; WA 18: 325-27 (Ibid.).

⁶ Luther had, in fact, argued basically the same thing in his 1523 treatise, "That a Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture," (LW 39: 305-314; WA 11: 408-16). What was often overlooked was that his call for monks to leave the monasteries, and for cities to call pastors for themselves, had far-reaching economic implications for both himself and his fellow monks! Cf. Brendler, Martin Luther: Theology & Revolution, 255, 262ff.

In the third section, Luther addresses both the princes and the peasants. Both sides, he says, have history and scripture against them. The best thing to do would be for both sides to stop calling themselves Christian and start negotiating. If violence erupts, the war will take on a life of its own. The only sure result is that many innocent people are hurt or even killed, and Germany will suffer a great setback. Thus, concludes Luther, "God hates both tyrants and rebels; therefore he sets them against each other."¹

III. THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS AND THE PEASANTS' WAR

Having examined the context of the three works which Luther composed concerning the Peasants' war, and having outlined the major themes of the first of these works, we are now in a better position to determine whether Luther followed his theology of the cross in addressing this event. To do so, Luther's dealings with the peasants' war will be studied from the perspective of both the "content" and the "methodology" of the *theologia crucis*. This division, while artificial, reveals some interesting perspectives.

A. The Content of the *Theologia Crucis* and Luther's Writings on the Peasants' War

For Luther, the content of the theology of the cross could be summarized as Christology. He rejects the peasants' use of the name "Christian" because "Christological" issues were not at stake. Since they did not follow the "Christian law," they did not have the Christological aspect

¹ LW 46: 41; WA 18: 331.19 (Admonition to Peace, 1525).

of the theology of the cross in their *Twelve Articles*.¹ This opinion is supported by the three main themes in the Christology of the *theologia crucis*: the emphasis on incarnation and cross; the role of faith, and the understanding of atonement.

1. The Hidden and Revealed God

While the hidden and revealed God was not discussed by the peasants, it was central in Luther's theology of the cross. He argues that God has chosen to be revealed in the Incarnate One, even though this self-revelation of God does not always occur where humanity would expect. Thus, Luther talks about God hidden and revealed. God is hidden in the Incarnate Christ—where people would least expect, in order to be revealed to those with eyes of faith.

For the peasants, God's will was mediated through the "elect."² Luther, however, argued that one only knows God—and the will of God!—through the revelation of God in Christ on the cross. This revelation reveals the will of God in terms quite different from what the peasants sought.³ Jesus told them that coats and shirts are to be given away, and both cheeks are to be offered to those who despise you (Matt. 5:37-44). This was not the revelation or will of God that the peasants wanted to hear about. But Luther insists it is the revelation of God that is meant for human beings. There is an echo of the theology of the cross in his discussion of this

¹ As Althaus states, ". . . it is Luther's theology of the cross which provides the content of his Christian Law." Althaus, The Ethics of Martin Luther, 33.

² Müntzer, for example, stresses this in both his "Sermon to the Princes" (July 13, 1524) and earlier in his "Prague Manifesto" (November, 1521). Thomas Müntzer, The Collected Works of Thomas Müntzer, Peter Matheson, ed. and trans. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 226-252, 352-379 (Hereafter referred to as CWTM).

³ LW 46: 28-9; WA 18: 309-10 (Admonition to Peace, 1525). In his later years, Luther continues to insist that "God is seen properly only in Christ." LW 22: 157; WA 46: 672.27-8 (Sermon on John 1:18, October 20, 1537). Luther is consistent on this point throughout his life.

matter, for he sums up his point by saying, "Cross! cross! Suffering! suffering! This and nothing else is the Christian law."¹ In Luther's mind, the peasants wanted neither crosses nor suffering. Furthermore, what the peasants attributed to God's revelation and the will of God was nothing more than what one could discover in natural law. It did not involve the self-revelation of the God hidden in the Incarnation.

This theme of the hidden and revealed God is also carried over into Luther's discussion of alien and proper righteousness.² Our own, or proper righteousness, while it appears to reveal God, serves rather to prevent us from seeing God's face. On the other hand, God is apparently hidden in the Incarnation, yet it is precisely through this Christ, who gives us a righteousness alien to us, that we are brought into God's presence.³ The righteousness that is alien to us reveals God's will for us in regards to our justification. This was not, however, the righteousness that the peasants sought. They wanted their own righteousness before human beings and God, brought about by their own efforts.⁴

¹ LW 46: 29; WA 18: 310.28-9 (*Admonition to Peace*, 1525). Cf. LW 31: 52-3; WA 1:362.1-34 (Theses 20-21, Heidelberg Disputation, 1518).

² See here Craz's discussion of *aliena et propria iustitia*, in Luther on Justice, Law and Society, 76ff.

³ God does oversee, however, our proper, or civic, righteousness, which is important in the temporal realm. It is not autonomous. Luther in fact argues that civic righteousness can cooperate with alien righteousness. LW 31: 299; WA 2: 146.36-7 (*Two Kinds of Righteousness*, 1519). See also Althaus, The Ethics of Martin Luther, 82. He writes, "Luther never abandons the political world to autonomous self-administration." Reinhold Seeberg, on the other hand, overlooks this important clarification. Seeberg, Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte, vol. 4/1, 340-41.

⁴ Our own righteousness is also a civic righteousness, and its emphasis is on living a good life and doing good works. Luther does not reject this civic righteousness, but he does argue that it is useful only in the presence of other human beings. It does not justify us in the presence of God. LW 31: 299; WA 2: 146.36ff (*Two Kinds of Righteousness*, 1519).

The Incarnation for Luther also reveals God's preference for coming down the ladder from heaven to earth, rather than constructing ladders for humanity to escape from the earth and see God in the heavens. Müntzer's critique of the princes—that they blocked the peasants' attempts to escape from the evils of this world and gain access to God—reflects this "theology of ascent," which he uses to justify his call to kill the princes who blocked their way.¹

2. The Understanding of Faith

Faith is a central aspect of the Christology in a theology of the cross. Luther defined faith as a trust in God; but trust in God was absent among both the peasants and the princes. More trust was put in the sword than in God for a resolution to the conflict.² Their approach suggested to Luther an understanding of Christianity based on works. This was, of course, contrary to Luther's view that one is saved by faith alone. But Müntzer, the "chaplain to the peasants,"³ considered such an approach incomplete, since it dealt only with one's standing before God, and not also with one's standing before others.⁴

¹ Blickle, The Revolution of 1525, 149. Cf. Del Pino, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," 263.

² LW 46: 29, 34; WA 18: 310.22ff, 319.18ff (Admonition to Peace, 1525).

³ The title given Müntzer by Hans Zeiss of Allstedt, in a letter to his cousin Christoph Meinhard of May 5, 1525. Günther Franz, Quellen, 513 (no. 175), as found in: The German Peasants' War: A History in Documents, Tom Scott and Bob Scribner, eds. and trans. (New Jersey and London: Humanities Press International, 1991), 238. The letter claims Müntzer is not a captain in command of a troop, but simply one of the preachers. Moreover, Zeiss argues that other preachers in the troop preached the gospel in accordance with Luther's interpretation.

⁴ CWTM, 199-202 (Protestations, 1523). Müntzer writes, for example, "The mark is missed completely if one preaches that faith and not works have to justify us." (p. 201). He also states, "if one says: 'Christ has achieved everything on his own,' that is really quite inadequate." (p. 199).

Central to Luther's understanding of faith was that it does not give us a present security. The certainty that faith offers must not be confused with a guarantee of temporal or spiritual security. If faith gives security, then trust in God is no longer needed. When the two realms are confused, however, faith becomes the currency by which security can be bought. That was the case with both the peasants and the princes. The princes, claiming to be "defenders of the gospel," were unjustly taxing the peasants in an attempt to gain financial security for themselves. Luther warns, them, however, that they are not as secure as they think. They will be punished by God for trying to obtain their security on the backs of the peasants.¹ The peasants also attempted to use the gospel alongside the sword to gain temporal security. But faith renounces such security. It offers the coat as well as the cloak; it suffers injustices rather than retaliates.² Thus, Luther advises those Christians who cannot tolerate the injustices done to them by princes to move somewhere else rather than rebel.³ Self-security in the temporal sphere is incompatible with the gospel and with faith.

Nor does faith guarantee success. Here Müntzer and Luther radically differ. Müntzer felt that "True faith was invincible; true conversion must be successful. Where this was not the case, faith could not be true."⁴ When he rallied the peasants to battle, he felt that success was

¹ LW 46: 19; WA 18: 293.34ff (Admonition to Peace, 1525).

² LW 46: 32; WA 18: 315.29ff (Ibid.).

³ LW 46: 36-7; WA 18: 323.21ff (Ibid.).

⁴ Abraham Friesen, Thomas Müntzer: Destroyer of the Godless (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 150.

certain.¹ Since they had obtained the true faith through suffering,² it was a foregone conclusion that they would succeed.

3. The Understanding of Atonement

Central to Luther's theology of the cross is the concept of atonement and salvation. This cannot be obtained through our proper righteousness, as the peasants appear to suggest.³ Justification before God comes through a righteousness foreign to us, which is a gift of God. While Christ reveals how we should live with one another, it does not affect our standing before God; the place of justification. It reveals, rather, how we should live once we are set right before God. In Luther's eyes, salvation is the presupposition rather than the goal of life.⁴

¹ One report recounts that Müntzer encouraged the peasants to attack on May 15th, reminding them that God was on their side. He boasted that he would be able to "catch all the bullets of the enemy in the sleeve of his coat." Friesen, Thomas Müntzer: A Destroyer of the Godless, 261. Quotation is taken from Akten zur Geschichte des Bauernkriegs in Mitteldeutschland, 3 Volumes. W. P. Fuchs and Günther Franz, eds., (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1964), vol. 2, 378, n. 3a.

Even when Müntzer addressed the princes, he implied that the outcome was obvious. The peasants were only doing what God had commanded. In a letter of May 12, 1525 (three days before the battle), Müntzer wrote to Count Ernst of Mansfeld, "The eternal, living God has commanded that you should be forcibly cast down from your seat, for you are no use to the Christian people; you are a scourge which chastens the friends of God... Obadiah the prophet says that your nest has to be torn down and smashed to pieces." Letter no. 88, CWTM, 156.

² Luther and Müntzer differed in their concept of *Anfechtung*, or struggles. For Luther, they come about as a result of one's faith--what one can expect as a Christian. For Müntzer, on the other hand, struggles and suffering produce faith.

³ The identification of the realm of God (in which one is justified in the presence of God) with the worldly realm by the peasants led them to attempt to bring about God's realm by their rebellion. From this perspective, then, Luther could argue that the peasants were guilty of trying to obtain justification *coram Deo* through their own or proper righteousness.

⁴ Del Pino, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," 264.

Another aspect of atonement in Luther's theology of the cross is the portrayal of God as judge. For Luther this meant that although we may be judged as righteous before other human beings (again, the notion of "proper, or civic, righteousness"), it is a different matter when we stand before God, when we finally face, not the God hidden by "masks,"¹ but the God whose very face is revealed to us.² It is this God alone who can judge who the elect are: no one else.³ Müntzer, on the other hand, felt that the elect had been given the right to judge and to extract vengeance; to separate the wheat from the tares in the time of harvest.⁴ If swords were needed for this task, so be it.⁵

B. The Methodology of the *Theologia Crucis* and Luther's Writings on the Peasants' War

The methodology inherent in Luther's theology of the cross is applicable to both the spiritual and temporal realms of existence. From a methodological perspective, therefore, the peasants and Luther have much common ground.

¹ On the notion of God's masks, see Luther's 1532 Commentary on Psalm 147:13, in WA 31: 435-6, and LW 14: 114, note 9. See also LW 26: 95; WA 40/I: 174.13-14 (1535 Galatians commentary); and LW 24: 67, n. 37 (1537 John Commentary).

Gritsch states that history is also a mask of God, which suggests that "the true Christian is unable either to comprehend God fully or to commit ultimate ethical deeds." Eric W. Gritsch, "Revolutionary Tradition of the West," 10. Cf. Althaus, The Ethics of Martin Luther, 80.

² In later years Luther writes, "The knowledge of the Gospel is the face of God, the message that we have grace and truth through the death of Christ." LW 22:158; WA 46: 673.19-20 (Sermon on John 1:18, October 20, 1537).

³ LW 46: 27-9; WA 18: 306-10 (Admonition to Peace, 1525).

⁴ Friesen emphasizes the importance of this theme in Müntzer. Thomas Müntzer: A Destroyer of the Godless.

⁵ Müntzer's Letter to the people of Allstedt, 26/27 April, 1525. CWTM, 140-42.

1. Incarnation, Cross and Solidarity

Luther's stress on the Incarnation as a starting point for theology implies that theology must begin with the suffering and struggles of the humanity into which Christ entered. The Incarnation, therefore, is an act of solidarity.¹ The specific circumstances about his birth and life, the background of his followers, and his proclamation all reveal that God has chosen to dwell with those who struggle or suffer. As a consequence, human suffering and struggles against oppression are to be taken seriously, and dealt with in practical, down-to-earth ways. Luther, recognizing this, suggests that the princes quit paying annates to Rome, using the money instead to alleviate local suffering and impoverishment.² Furthermore, the princes need to address the grievances of the peasants. His themes of "Christian freedom"³ and the "priesthood of all believers,"⁴ were applied to the secular realm and were taken as expressions of the reformation support of solidarity with those oppressed. In return, Luther received shows of solidarity by those around him, including, most likely, the peasants.⁵ These themes, made popular in pamphlet form, were also used by the peasants to support their demands for justice

¹ For a good treatment of the Incarnation and the cross as an act of solidarity, see Jon Sobrino, Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach, John Drury, trans. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1978), 225ff.

² LW 44: 156-58; WA 6: 427-29 (To the Christian Nobility, 1520). Brendler correctly notes that this action was not just a benefit to the princes--it was needful for the entire population. In this light, Luther is reminding the princes to act as servants of the people and should therefore pass on their savings by reducing the taxes on the peasants, rather than withholding the annates and using them for their own selfish luxuries. Brendler, Martin Luther: Theology & Revolution, 178.

³ LW 31: 333-377; WA 7: 49-73 (The Freedom of a Christian, 1520).

⁴ LW 44: 123-217; WA 6: 404-469 (To the Christian Nobility, 1520).

⁵ LW 42:161-62; WA 6: 131.16-19 (Fourteen Consolations, 1520).

and equity.¹ As Oberman notes, they became "slogans that electrified and mobilized the peasants everywhere."²

Luther also suggested that preachers and all others in appropriate vocations or callings must address the consciences of governing officials and admonish them when needed.³ He does not, as is often mistakenly assumed, dismiss the peasants' grievances or say that they are unjustified; his only criticism is that they are primarily issues related to natural law rather than the gospel or the spiritual realm. However, Luther's main concern was theological and ecclesiastical reform rather than socio-economic and political reforms. As a result, he naively trusted the Christian princes to act properly towards the peasants.⁴

The Incarnation as a methodology also reveals the need for inversions. While Luther deals extensively with this theme in his 1521 commentary on the Magnificat,⁵ and even suggests that the ecclesiastical authorities needed to be thrown off their thrones of power and become servants,⁶ he nevertheless insists that this inversion will be an act of God, rather than a human endeavour. It will take place according to God's timetable and in a manner that God alone

¹ Brendler, Martin Luther: Theology & Revolution, 176ff.

² Oberman, "The Gospel of Social Unrest," 105. Yet, as Oberman notes, the reformation, and these popular themes, were merely "accelerators" of the social unrest rather than its source.

³ LW 44: 103; WA 6: 267.31-6 (Treatise on Good Works, 1520). Luther follows this advice in the "Admonition to Peace," as has already been noted. He also speaks out strongly against the princes in his 1520 treatise, "To the Christian Nobility," LW 44: 212-16; WA 6: 465-68. Cf. Althaus, The Ethics of Martin Luther, 130-31. The princes are to act as servants of the people, to insure that justice is done to all, rather than as tyrants.

⁴ Hans J. Hillerbrand, "The German Reformation and the Peasants' War," 109.

⁵ LW 21: 295-355; WA 7: 538-604 (Sermon on the Magnificat, 1521).

⁶ See especially Luther's comment in LW 31: 333-377; WA 7: 49-73 (The Freedom of a Christian, 1520), and LW 36:11-126; WA 6: 497-573 (Babylonian Captivity of the Church, 1520).

chooses. Luther could agree with the peasants on the need for inversions in society, but he disagreed with them when they felt that it was in their power, and in fact within their God-given right, to implement those inversions themselves. Their job was to proclaim the Word; God would take care of the rest.¹ To do otherwise would be to act in God's place. As Luther states, "because you do not want to triumph by suffering, but by your fists, you are interfering with God's vengeance and you will keep neither the gospel nor your fists."²

2. Dealing Honestly with Reality

The theology of the cross calls one to deal honestly with reality. Instead of running from reality, a theology of the cross calls a person to face it. A theologian of the cross calls a thing what it is.³ Luther recognized the reality of the peasants' situation and called it unjust. The princes were at fault. But he was also aware of the reality of human nature; that problems arose when one group set about to judge other groups. Selfish interests always emerged,⁴ and people tried to become gods rather than remain human. In the process, those who acted as gods treated the others as less than human. At the same time, they denied their own humanity as well.

¹ WABr 2: 249.12ff (Letter to Spalatin, January 16, 1521). Luther also expresses, in his second sermon at Wittenberg of March 10, 1522, that God's word accomplishes everything, destroying the papacy in a way the princes or emperors never could, while he slept or drank Wittenberg beer with Melanchthon and Nicholas von Amsdorf. LW 51:77; WA 10/III: 18.15-19.2 (Wittenberg Sermons, 1522).

² LW 46: 31; WA 18: 312.33-313.20 (Admonition to Peace, 1525).

³ See here thesis 21 of the Heidelberg Disputation, LW 31: 53; WA 1: 362.21-2: "A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls a thing what it actually is."

⁴ LW 45: 103-4; WA 11: 261.6-24 (Temporal Authority, 1522-23).

Luther accused the princes of precisely this thing: acting like gods while treating the peasants as objects to be used.¹

Luther's definition of the human being as "*simul iustus et peccator*" also reflected his view of human reality. Too often in the process of justifying an uprising, the issues are portrayed in simplistic terms: the good against the bad.² This simplistic approach justified the separation of the wheat from the tares.³ Luther's view of human reality, complete with paradoxes, reveals his scepticism over this simplistic view. He was also sceptical of any attempts at creating a Theocracy or an ideological blueprint for German society.⁴ The sincerity of the peasants' desire to be led by the gospel is likewise met with scepticism. In fact, he boldly states, "I know that none of you has ever once prayed to God or called upon him in behalf of this cause. You could not do it! You dare not lift up your eyes to him in this case."⁵

Luther's rejection of rebellion can also be partially understood on the grounds that a rebellion refuses to work within the world as it is. In this sense, rebellion is an attempt to escape from the humanness and stark realities of life in favour of a utopian just and fair society. In that

¹ LW 45: 120; WA 11: 273.7-13 (Temporal Authority, 1522-1523).

² Müntzer portrayed this dichotomy as one between the elect and the godless. See here Blickle's succinct analysis, The Revolution of 1525, 157ff.

³ Friesen, Thomas Müntzer: A Destroyer of the Godless, 163-65, 197. While Müntzer recognizes the fact that the church on earth cannot be completely without tares, he still felt that the "tares" should be under the control and judgement of the elect. See Müntzer's letter to John Zeiss, the administrator of Allstedt, of July 25, 1524. He writes, "When the pious make a covenant, even though there be evil-doers in it too, the latter will not succeed in pushing through their selfish aims; the bluff honesty of the good folk will keep them from committing anything like the amount of wickedness that they would otherwise..." CWTM, 102. Cf. his letter of May 17, 1525 to the people of Mühlhausen. CWTM, 160-61.

⁴ Oberman, Luther : Man between God and the Devil, Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart, trans. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 79ff.

⁵ LW 46: 33; WA 18: 318 (Admonition to Peace, 1525).

respect, rebellion can be seen as a rejection of the world that Christ entered: it is nothing more than "social suicide."¹

Luther further argues that both suffering and unjust authorities are simply realities of life.

He writes, in the "Open Letter on the Harsh Book,"

If you want to live in a community, you must share the community's burdens, dangers and injuries, even though not you, but your neighbour has caused them. You must do this in the same way that you enjoy the peace, profit, protection, wealth, freedom, and security of the community, even though you have not won them or brought them into being.²

Since princes will abuse those whom they have authority over, in order to gain some "security," suffering is to be expected.³ Yet, despite the injustice of the princes, Luther argued that they

¹ As argued by Heinz F. Mackensen, "Historical Interpretation and Luther's role in the Peasants' Revolt," Concordia Theological Monthly 35 (1964), 208. This stark image of revolution as social suicide suggests that the peasants rejected the reality of the world as it was, and chose to change things from outside of the accepted channels. While this is not meant to suggest that "all" human realities and situations must be passively accepted without a fight, it does suggest that the struggles for justice will not happen if those fighting for justice take themselves out of the picture.

In Luther's mind, reform which worked within the existing structures, was acceptable--and in fact needed; while revolution was to be avoided, since it attempted to go outside of the existing structures.

² LW 46: 78; WA 18: 396.12-16 (Open Letter on the Harsh Book, 1525).

³ This suffering, however, differs from suffering that is a direct result of being a Christian. When a Christian endures suffering, God's realm paradoxically enters into the world. See here Althaus, The Ethics of Martin Luther, 34.

Even though Luther and Müntzer both had theologies of *Anfechtung* (which might be explained by the influence of Tauler and the *Deutsche Theologie* upon both of them), there are major differences in what they meant by the term *Anfechtung*. For Müntzer, the focus was on the sufferings and crosses of the individual, whereas for Luther the focus was on the suffering and cross of Christ. For a discussion of Müntzer's mystical influences, see Hans-Jürgen Goertz, Innere und äussere Ordnung in der Theologie Thomas Müntzers, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 25-28. Cf. Gritsch, "Müntzer and Luther: A Tragedy of Errors," Radical Tendencies in the Reformation: Divergent Perspectives, Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., vol. IX, Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies. (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1988), 57ff.

(continued...)

were appointed by God. There is a certain validity, then, in Müntzer's comments that Luther was a supporter of the status quo in the political realm.¹ What Luther forgot was that there was more than one definition of reality, depending on one's vantage point. He did not understand—or accept—the peasants' definition or description of the reality of life.

At this point it is important to recognize there is a tension in the methodology of the theology of the cross between the need to accept and deal honestly with society and the opposite need for inversions and reversals in society. Luther, however, did not always live with the tension very well. In the peasants' war, he stressed the need to deal with and accept the reality of God-ordained secular authority, but neglected the peasants's view of reality which demanded reversals. Yet both are a part of the theology of the cross. A more equitable balance between these two themes would have helped him in dealing with the situation in a more helpful and constructive way, and it would have better reflected the fact that the "*simul iustus et peccator*" definition of reality applied not only to individuals and society, but also to the methodological approach itself.

³(...continued)

Furthermore, while for Luther suffering comes as a result of following the gospel, and of being a part of the reality of life, for Müntzer suffering was for the purpose of purifying one's soul so that they are worthy to be one of the elect. Thus, suffering leads to being justified, rather than Luther's view that since one is justified, suffering will ensue. Cf. Del Pino, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," 264.

¹ See here Gritsch, Thomas Müntzer: A Tragedy of Errors, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 117; Idem, Martin: God's Court Jester, 122; and Friesen, Thomas Müntzer: A Destroyer of the Godless, 166. However, as Del Pino notes, this charge is not completely warranted. Del Pino, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," 268.

3. Application to Church and Society

The methodology of Luther's theology of the cross demanded that it be a practical, rather than speculative, theology. Unfortunately, however, Luther restricted this principle almost exclusively to ecclesiastical issues. He attacked the ecclesiastical authorities for confusing the spiritual and the temporal realms and for becoming temporal tyrants. He focused on this, rather than on the tyranny of temporal authorities within the temporal realm. Yet this did not stop him from offering advice concerning the temporal realm. He criticized the princes for their abuses of the peasants. Nor does Luther appear to object to the obviously political use of his treatises in the multitude of pamphlets (*Flugschriften*) that inundated the marketplaces in Germany in the 1520's. As Hillerbrand states;

...it was characteristic of many pamphlets that what had been marginal emphases in Luther's own writings became central concerns. Luther's essential openness toward the social and political issues of his day was modified so that these issues assumed a definite priority over those pertaining to religion. Questions of societal reform, of judicial change, or of economic equity become important. ...Luther himself never protested against the intriguing variants of his own teaching propounded by the *Flugschriften*.¹

In discerning Luther's role in political and socio-economic issues, one must also remember that, according to some scholars, the *Twelve Articles* themselves may have been heavily influenced by Luther's own theology.² If that is indeed the case, it could be argued that

¹ Hillerbrand, "The German Reformation and the Peasants' War," 118.

² Martin Brecht, for example, argues that the Twelve Articles were strongly influenced by Christoph Schappeler and Sebastian Lotzer, who in turn were influenced to a large degree by Luther's theology. Brecht goes on to argue that the Twelve Articles are more theological than political. Brecht, "Der theologische Hintergrund der Zwölf Artikel der Bauernschaft in Schwaben von 1525," 174-208. As already noted, the first article reflects the peasants' awareness of Luther's treatises which dealt with the right for congregations to choose their own pastors.

Following this approach, Oberman, among others, suggests that the twelve articles are to be understood primarily as theological concerns. If so, the connection between these articles
(continued...)

while he supported or even indirectly contributed to the development of the *Twelve Articles*, he strongly refused to have them considered as "Christian" issues. They belonged to the realm of natural law rather than Christology or Christological concerns. The gospel was not to be conceived of as a legal standard by which "fleshly" issues are settled. That would be nothing more than a radical biblicism which did not distinguish between the law and gospel inherent in scripture.¹

Clearly, Luther did not disapprove of social reforms or change. In fact, he pushed for many such reforms, and he also felt, as early as 1520, that it was the duty of people in appropriate vocations, as part of their civic duty, to speak out against injustice.² While religious concerns were primary for him, he did not ignore social and economic concerns—even though he placed some limits on them. He did not feel that the term "Christian" should be applied to social reforms, but rather it should be reserved for the spiritual realm, which concerned one's standing before God. Social concerns and reform were important, but they revolved around issues of

²(...continued)

and Luther might be much stronger than previously suggested. If Oberman is correct, however, then one must ask why Luther so strenuously objected to the peasants' use of the word "Christian." Oberman, "The Gospel of Social Unrest," 118ff. It also means that the peasants' war is more of a religious revolt than anything else.

Hillerbrand, on the other hand, based on his compilation of grievance lists throughout Germany, concludes that the grievances were largely socio-economic and political. The revolt may have had a religious impetus because of the tyranny of certain factions of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, but it quickly became a much broader movement. Religious concerns and reforms only seemed to give the people more freedom or desire to also undertake political and socio-economic reforms. Hillerbrand, "The German Reformation and the Peasants' War," 121-25, 133-36.

¹ Brendler, Martin Luther: Theology & Revolution, 271.

² LW 44: 103; WA 6: 267.31-6 (Treatise on Good Works, 1520).

natural law, rather than what he called "Christian law." His definition of the reality and the extent of the gospel was different from the definition offered by the peasants.

Luther also rejected programs of social reform when they were made into an ideology or as the only acceptable blueprint for society. He insisted that all social reforms were to be understood merely as attempts to better society. There was no place for "utopias" in Luther's social and theological thought. Nor could one force the realm of God upon people by demanding that they accept one particular vision of what society should be like, based on a personal, mystical experience or interpretation of the gospel. Theocracies did not work. The division between the wheat and the tares in the church cannot be forced upon society as a whole. Such actions would deny the central tenets of the theology of the cross; the recognition that human beings are *simul iustus et peccator*, and the paradox of the hidden and revealed God. Furthermore, the desire to institute a theocracy was, in the reformer's mind, an attempt to make God's realm into a security or a possession of the temporal realm. In many respects, Luther was politically very naive.¹ For example, his view of temporal authority rested upon the authority of the princes, not with the civic authority of the subjects.² As a result, only the

¹ This is noted by Ritter; "The lack of instinct with which Martin Luther faced actual political problems throughout his life is explained to a significant degree by his purely scholastic theological education. Compare him to Calvin, the trained jurist!" Gerhard Ritter, "Romantic and Revolutionary Elements in German Theology on the Eve of the Reformation," The Reformation in Medieval Perspective, Steven E. Ozment, ed. (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 26. See also, Gerhard Müller, "Martin Luther and the Political World of His Time," Politics and Society in Reformation Europe, E. I. Kouri and Tom Scott, eds. (London: MacMillan Press, 1987), 35-50. Brendler, on the contrary, attributes a certain amount of political insight to Luther, suggesting that he was not so politically naive as has been so often thought. Brendler, Martin Luther: Theology & Revolution, 25, 51, *et passim*.

² Moltmann, for example, criticizes Luther for not speaking with equal weight to both sides, in "Reformation and Revolution," 178. Brendler, on the other hand, suggests this merely reflects Luther's class bias. Brendler, Martin Luther: Theology & Revolution, 294-96.

princes were allowed to abuse temporal authority. Moreover, Luther felt that the agriculturally based feudal structure was to be preferred over a commercial, trade-based economy,¹ and therefore it was important to support the feudal structure, even though it was abused by the princes. Luther's politically limited vision and his distrust of human motives did not allow him to see any alternative political structures. Nor did he realize that in certain situations an entire social class could be within its rights to use force to obtain justice.² He also failed to understand that ecclesiastical reforms were impossible to fully implement without reforms in society.³ While Luther's caution and even rejection of many social and political reforms may be attributed to his fear of anarchy,⁴ this does not completely explain his political conservatism.

¹ LW 44: 212-13; WA 6: 465.25-466.12 (To the Christian Nobility, 1520). See also LW 45: 245-310; WA 15: 293-313, 321-322 and WA 6: 36-60 (Treatise on Trade and Usury, 1524).

² As von Loewenich suggests. Martin Luther: the Man and His Work, Lawrence Denef, trans. (Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 264.

³ As noted by Hillerbrand, "The German Reformation and the Peasants' War," 118; and Moltmann, "Reformation and Revolution," 170-71, 184.

⁴ It could be questioned whether Luther was simply afraid of anarchy, or something else. He may instead have been concerned that with the loss of authority by the princes, the Roman church would again step in and take over temporal authority, thus destroying the reformation's progress. Or was Luther merely of the opinion that the chaos of anarchy meant that the devil had won over the worldly sphere, and thus the gospel would no longer be proclaimed? Furthermore, if Luther did fear anarchy, one must wonder how much his experience as a student in Erfurt during the "year of madness" influenced him. In this regard, see von Loewenich, Martin Luther: The Man and His Work, 67. Cf. Luther's reflections on the "year of madness" in WATr 2: 488, no. 2494b (1532 Table Talks recorded by Cordatus).

IV. CONCLUSION

By reflecting on these themes, and by keeping in mind the major themes of the theology of the cross, certain conclusions can be drawn.

First, in dealing with the peasants' war, Luther did not reject or put aside the theology of the cross. Based on his understanding of the main themes of the content, or Christology of the theology of the cross, Luther rightly rejected the peasants' requests because they ignored Christological, and therefore "gospel," concerns. They did not revolve around the theological significance of the hidden and revealed God, one's understanding of faith, or the question of how the incarnation was to be understood. One's standing in the presence of God was not the issue at stake. On the other hand, in terms of method, Luther could agree with the peasants about the legitimacy of their concerns; but he insisted that they were part of natural law, rather than the "Christian law." In simplistic terms, the peasants followed the methodology but not the "content" (or Christology) of the theology of the cross.

While Luther and the peasants agreed on many methodological themes, he disagreed with them on certain methodological interpretations. They read the "signs of the times" differently. They defined reality differently. Moreover, Luther felt that the peasants, in their definition of reality, reduced the paradoxes inherent in human life. The paradox that saints were also sinners was rejected and made into a clear distinction between the sinners and saints. Nor could Luther accept the tendency to absolutize the right to justice or security, on the grounds that they were God-given, or "divine" rights. To do so would be to overlook the reality of human sin and humanity's self-serving nature, while suggesting that the Realm of God could be obtained on earth through human efforts and enforced changes.

Luther and the peasants also perceived the reality and usefulness of revolutions differently. Luther expressed doubts about their usefulness, suggesting that rebellion may bring about change, but it "has never had a good end."¹ Moreover, revolutions tended to get out of control. Thus, the reality for Luther was that the only thing accomplished by revolution was that a lot of innocent people got hurt or killed. Rather than working for the "betterment" of their society, therefore, Luther felt that the peasants wanted to go outside its boundaries and create a utopian society that was not possible.

Perhaps, however, Luther did not follow his own teachings about the theology of the cross at this point. In defining reality, he suggests that his understanding of revolution and of civil authority was the only acceptable view. At this point the paradoxes inherent in human life are rejected, leading to an unacceptably simplified view of life. Authorities were always God's representatives in the temporal realm, and thus always to be obeyed. Forgotten was his emphasis that the hidden and revealed God was present in the temporal sphere and in temporal authorities as well as in the spiritual sphere. Yet Luther missed this paradoxical situation. He opted for the two-realm view of passive obedience to temporal authority, rather than the theme of inversion, which was found in his theology of the cross. Furthermore, the tension inherent in his methodology, between the acceptance of reality and the need for inversions, is also not present at this point.

Another weakness in his application of the method of the theology of the cross to the peasants' situation is that while Luther criticized Müntzer and the peasants for "forcing" their understanding of the gospel upon the people, he basically did the same thing. His insistence that Christian peasants had to follow the "Christian law" was an attempt to force society as a whole

¹ LW 46: 41; WA 18: 330.28-9 (Admonition to Peace, 1525).

to act in a certain "Christian" way. Furthermore, his vindictive advice to the princes to "smite, slay, and stab," does the very thing which he accuses the peasants of doing: confusing the two realms. In giving this advice, Luther, as a proclaimer of the Word, was in effect using the sword.

Second, one must conclude that, contrary to Moltmann, Luther did have a political theology of the cross; it is just not the political theology of the cross that Moltmann wanted. Luther's *theologia crucis* contains social criticisms, but not the ones Moltmann wants to hear. However, it must be noted that Luther's political theology of the cross-- when too strongly governed by his two-realms theory, or when the methodological tensions of the *theologia crucis* are not present--does have some problems which limit its effectiveness and hinders the liberating effect of the cross.

One of the problems of Luther's political theology of the cross stems from the relationship between the gospel and society as outlined in his two-realms theory. The separation of the two realms has definite limitations. For example, Luther questioned whether anything dealing with the secular sphere could be considered "Christian." Yet love of God and love of neighbour cannot be separated. A two-realms approach also limits the implications of the Incarnation. The "Word become flesh" implies an Incarnation into the temporal sphere, into the political, social and economic world as well as the spiritual sphere. Furthermore, the Two-realm theory lends a certain rigidity to any interpretation of secular authority (*Obrigkeit*), which tends to stifle any calls for change. It stressed an acceptance of the "status quo," of "reality" as it is. From the perspective of a theology of the cross, however, the theme of inversions or "reversals" in the political and social spheres provides a needed counterbalance to this rigid view of authority and to any passive acceptance of reality as defined by those in authority. While Luther freely

called for reversals and inversions in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, he attempted to limit it to this sphere--despite the fact that such a limitation was very arbitrary and often impossible to discern in his society. Thus, Luther failed to either realize or implement the corresponding need for reversals in the social and political sphere. He also failed to keep the themes of inversion and acceptance of society in a healthy tension. One of the most obvious failures in Luther's application of the theology of the cross to the peasants' war was that he applied the theology of the cross primarily to the peasants, while letting the princes off with admonitions to behave themselves. As a result, one could argue that Luther did not push the methodology of a theology of the cross to its logical conclusions, especially with regard to the princes' part in the peasants' war. This further suggests that it was Luther's failure to apply the methodology of the theology of the cross evenly and consistently in this situation, rather than the methodology of the theology of the cross itself, which is responsible for many of the difficulties caused by his approach to the events as they unfolded.

Third, while the methodology inherent in the theology of the cross (and to a lesser extent, the Christology) provided justification for Luther's involvement in social and political reform, he did not develop the implications of his theology of the cross to any great degree in these areas. His focus was on the Christology of the theology of the cross, not its methodology or its social and political implications. From the perspective of the content he followed the theology of the cross in his dealing with the peasants. Yet his application of its methodology was inconsistent; at times he even contradicted, rather than complemented, the content of the *theologia crucis*. Likewise, while Luther followed the methodology and content of the theology of the cross in his dialogue with the ecclesiastical authorities, when it came to social, economic and political concerns, he emphasized the Christology while the methodology was overlooked.

On the other hand, Luther's critique of the peasants—that they used the methodology of a theology of the cross, but ignored its content—cannot be overlooked. To rob a theology of the cross of its unique Christological content or nature is to rob it of its transforming power. In one sense, this lack of Christological content is a criticism that might also be levelled against some contemporary political theologies of the cross, as will be seen in the following chapters.

In conclusion, Luther's uneven application of both the methodology and the content of a theology of the cross to the peasants' war led to many unfortunate situations. He withdrew from solidarity with the peasants. Unjust authority was deemed acceptable. Reversals were suppressed. Reality was defined from the perspective of those in authority. The two-realms theory became the standard approach from which to apply Luther's social ethic, rather than the theology of the cross. As a result, the potential of the theology of the cross to be a truly transforming power in both church and society was overlooked. Whether this will change remains to be seen. In Part Two, therefore, one of the tasks will be to explore possible applications of the theology of the cross to church and society, and to see if the theology of the cross can be central to the *praxis* as well as the theological content of contemporary theologies.

PART TWO
CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGIES AND THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

CHAPTER FOUR
POLITICAL THEOLOGY AND THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

I. INTRODUCTION

Having given the broad outline of Luther's theology of the cross, and having studied his application of this theology to the peasants' war, attention is now turned to the second part of this dissertation, namely, a comparison of Luther's theology of the cross with a sampling of contemporary theologies present in the North American context. In this section, four different contemporary theologies will be studied: political theology, hinterland theology, contextual theology, and black theology. In each case, the theological content and methodology will be analyzed in light of Luther's theology of the cross to determine whether this theology of the cross has, or could have, any significance or usefulness in the contemporary theologies studied. At the same time, there will be an attempt made to discover ways in which Luther's theology of the cross might be further developed or modified so that it can be a more significant theology in the contemporary world.

It would be appropriate at this juncture to reiterate some of the basic criteria used in determining which contemporary theologies were chosen. First, the four contemporary theologies that were chosen each offered a significantly different perspective or approach. In other words, four variations of political theology were avoided. Instead, a political theology from a Roman Catholic perspective, a Marxist/political theology from a Protestant perspective, a explicitly contextual theology, and a theology that focuses on racial issues were selected. Second, only North American theologies were selected. As a result, each of the theologians address the same

political, geographical, and theological context, even though they interpret this same context quite differently. By dealing with the same context, one is able to compare these theologians with each other, as well as with Luther's theology of the cross. Third, within the North American context, a conscious effort was made to select minority voices whenever there was a choice between two theologians having similar theological perspectives. Thus, apart from James Cone, Canadian theologians were selected over Americans, since they are writing from a minority perspective as citizens of a country overshadowed by its southern neighbour. Cone, on the other hand, was selected because his theology reflects a minority voice within the American context. De Roo was chosen over Gregory Baum, not only because De Roo is less well-known in academic circles than is Baum, but also because De Roo provides, as a Bishop, the voice of an ecclesiastical official, rather than the more obviously academic voices of the other contemporary theologians that were chosen. Fourth, each of the theologians chosen provide a clear outline of their theological content and hermeneutical approach, allowing for comparisons with Luther's theology of the cross to take place. They were not chosen, on the other hand, because of any apparent crypto-Lutheranism in their works. Only Douglas John Hall, for example, explicitly draws upon Luther's theology of the cross. The task was made more interesting, perhaps, by the fact that the contemporary theologians were chosen regardless of their sympathies or prejudices towards Luther or Lutheranism.

The first contemporary theology which will be studied is political theology. Political theology is broadly defined as theology which seeks to be expressed and made concrete in the life of society or the people (*polis*). J. B. Metz suggests that the primary function of political

theology is the "deprivatization of theology,"¹ while Frederick Herzog and Jürgen Moltmann see it as awaking the political consciousness of theology.² Dorothee Soelle defines political theology as "theology that has reflected systematically upon the relation of faith and politics."³ In each definition, however, what is clear is that all theology is political: it either supports the status quo or challenges it. It cannot be neutral.

The political theology that will be examined in this chapter is that of Remi De Roo, bishop of the Victoria, British Columbia Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church. Active for many years on the Social Affairs Commission of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB), he has been involved in the preparation of some of the most important ecclesiastical social justice statements made in Canada. Because of this, it is not surprising that much of his writing involves a commentary on the various statements which have been issued. Any discussion of De Roo's work, therefore, also entails in an indirect way, a discussion of the statements made by the Social Affairs Commission of the CCCC.

In any attempt at using Luther's theology of the cross as a basis for a contemporary political theology, such as that proposed by De Roo, certain considerations must be taken into account. Different historical, ecclesiastical, sociological and anthropological perspectives are involved. Their contexts differ. Luther was a late medieval German theologian and pastor, alienated from the Catholic Church, while De Roo is a late 20th century theologian and bishop

¹ Johannes B. Metz, Theology of the World, William Glen-Doepel, trans. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 110.

² Frederick Herzog, "Political Theology in the American Context," Theological Markings 1 (Spring 1971), 28-42; Jürgen Moltmann, "Political Theology," Theology Today 28 (April 1971), 7-9.

³ Dorothee Soelle, Political Theology, John Shelley, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 55.

of the Roman Catholic Church in Canada. The most pressing issue in society for Luther was a church which he felt had gone wayward in its theology. For De Roo, however, the most crucial issue is that of a society whose economic policies force large segments of society into marginalization. He sees the need to probe the social structures which cause suffering,¹ while Luther wanted to probe the theology of those speculative theologians who preferred to focus on the God in the heavens rather than on the Incarnate Christ. The different concerns that arose from these diverse contexts have also led to different views of the church. Luther felt the church needed reforming, while De Roo sees the church as an agent for reforming society. As a result, even though the methodological approaches they use may be similar, the concerns and audiences they address are very different, as are many of the theological emphases. Because of these great differences in their respective contexts, therefore, it is somewhat artificial to ask questions--or to provide answers!--from Luther's theology which most contemporary political theologians are not directly seeking or concerned about. On the other hand, if the theologians of the past are not remembered and reflected on in light of the present context, the present will lose contact with its tradition and rich heritage, and with it a perspective from which to evaluate their own present context, as De Roo very well knows.²

Not only are the contexts different: the approaches also differ. Luther was primarily a theologian who criticized society on the basis of his theological analysis. De Roo's theological perspective, on the other hand, is implicit in his use of social analysis.³

¹ De Roo, Cries of Victims: Voice of God (Ottawa: Novalis, 1986), 62.

² De Roo, "Women in the Church: Challenge for the Future," Grail 3 (June 1987), 18.

³ These differences are illustrated by Gregory Baum, for example, in his discussion of why Douglas John Hall is not well known among secular thinkers in Canada. Baum states, ". . . Hall
(continued...)"

There is, despite all this, validity in comparing De Roo's theology to Luther's theology of the cross, even though De Roo himself never uses the term, *theologia crucis*. First, it will reveal the many ways in which some aspects of a theology of the cross are already present--if only implicitly--in many contemporary political theologies. Second, it may reveal some of the weaknesses of Luther's theology of the cross as a political theology. Finally, such a comparison will provide criteria to determine whether or not the theology of the cross can provide the basis for a contemporary political theology. This comparison will be based on the similarities and differences between them in their method for doing theology, and their Christological content.

II. THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS AS A METHODOLOGY

In his article, "Does the Church Have a Role to Play in Canadian Life?" De Roo gives the method or hermeneutic of his approach. There are five steps in this methodology, which De Roo defines as:

. . . presence to people, looking deeply at the reality that people live, applying the Gospel, and making moral judgements about the situation, looking for

³(...continued)

remains essentially a theologian: his books and articles are addressed to Christians in search of guidance and understanding. In this respect his writings differ considerably from the work of the Quebec theologian Jacques Grand'Maison, who is engaged in a dialogue with political and social science and for the most part addresses his books and articles to concerned Quebecers, whether they be Catholic or secular." Gregory Baum, "Douglas Hall: Contextual Theology," The Church in Quebec (Ottawa: Novalis, 1991), 109-10.

creative alternatives, and finally, taking practical steps, carrying forward specific strategies for the bettering of society.¹

These five steps have a very close similarity to Luther's three aspects of the hermeneutic of the theology of the cross.² Luther begins with the centrality of the Incarnation. For De Roo, this is echoed in his phrase, "presence to people." Second, Luther argues that the theology of the cross deals honestly with reality. For De Roo, this is reflected in steps two and three: looking deeply at the reality that people live, applying the Gospel, and making moral judgements about the situation. Third, the theology of the cross for Luther involves an application to church and society. This theme is also present in De Roo's fourth and fifth steps, namely, "looking for creative alternatives and taking practical steps, carrying forward specific strategies for the bettering of society." These similarities between Luther and De Roo will be substantiated and examined in greater detail in the following pages.

A. Incarnation, Cross and Solidarity

De Roo feels that the Incarnation is central to his ministry as a bishop.³ Furthermore, this Incarnation is more than an abstract theory:

¹ Remi De Roo, "Does the Church Have a Role to Play in Canadian Life?" Grail 1 (March 1985), 11. See also Cries of Victims, 8. These are also the steps used by the CCCB in "Ethical Choices and Political Challenges: A Brief to the Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada" (December, 1983), as found in E.F. Sheridan, ed., Do Justice! The Social Teachings of the Canadian Catholic Bishops, (Sherbrooke, Quebec: Éditions Paulines; and Toronto: Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice, 1987), 411-434.

² The most concise description of Luther's method is found in theses 19-21 of the Heidelberg Disputation of 1518 (LW 31: 52-3; WA 1: 361-2).

³ De Roo states, for example, "my approach is of one who believes in the ongoing incarnation of God's word." Cries of Victims, 17.

Christ was God alive in our midst as one of us, sharing the blood, sweat and tears of our earthly pilgrimage. Like the Lord Jesus, the church is to be one with humanity, working and struggling with the human world as it is, and one with the Spirit which leads God's people to the kingdom.¹

For De Roo, the Incarnation means that Christ enters into the very struggles of humanity, and not just into a human form that is aloof from true humanity. As he notes:

And what does Jesus do? He shares our poverty, suffering with those who are suffering, struggling with those who struggle against the forces of evil, in order that we may be brought to the fullness of life.²

This emphasis on the Incarnation also provides De Roo with a theological justification for the "preferential though not exclusive option for the poor."³ Here he is much more specific than Luther, suggesting that God is with all who are marginalized and placed on the fringes of society because of economic policies. God identifies with the marginalized, not just with humanity in general. Thus, he is able to support the statement made by Pope John Paul II while in Canada: "Christ Jesus has become Indian, Metis and Inuit."⁴ It reveals the extent and radicalness of the Incarnation.

This solidarity based on the Incarnation also provides a model for a church seeking to become truly incarnate within society:

...we must try, as the Canadian Bishops have been doing, to develop our capacity for compassion, compassion in the very deep sense of the Latin word:

¹ De Roo, Cries of Victims, 18.

² Ibid., 20. De Roo also argues that this gives humanity the reason to listen to the poor and to support the preferential option for the poor. As he writes, "...the poor are God's own choice. As the Letter of Paul to the Philippians says, through his incarnation Christ became poor for us so that he could enrich us." Ibid., 59.

³ Ibid., 63.

⁴ Ibid., 131. The Pope made this statement at Yellowknife, NWT. For the text of the speech, see, Canada: Celebrating our Faith, compiled and indexed by the Daughters of St. Paul (Boston: St Paul Editions, 1985), article 4, 282.

compassio, to suffer with, *compati*, to suffer with people, not just to take pity on them from a distance, but to actually live with them, the sufferings they go through, and out of that develop a living and vital solidarity. This presence must be in a special way "presence to the victims."¹

The second theme found in Luther's understanding of the Incarnation is that of the hidden and revealed God. He argues that the church needs to hear the voices of those who suffer direct or indirect violence because of unjust economic systems and structures, for in their voices, the "Lord of history is revealed to us."² Here, De Roo and Luther have a common understanding: God is found dwelling among the poor and the marginalized, where one would least expect!³ While history would appear to reveal that God is obviously with those who are financially secure or successful, De Roo turns the tables and talks instead about the Lord of history being revealed in a church that has chosen to be with the poor. It is among the poor that "God's plan of liberation is discovered and salvation history made manifest."⁴

There is a difference between Luther and De Roo, however, regarding the hiddenness of God. For Luther, God's ways are hidden from a church--or more specifically, theologians and those in positions of authority--caught up in power and glorious affairs. For De Roo, on the other hand, the significance of the Incarnation is hidden from those in society who wield economic power. Yet the practical outcome is the same. Both powers failed to see the Incarnation as God's preferential way of being revealed to this world. It was foreign to their "theological" perspectives.

¹ De Roo, "Does the Church Have a Role to Play in Canadian Life?" 12-13.

² De Roo, Cries of Victims, 66.

³ As Luther notes, this is where God's throne is! Atkinson, Luther: Early Theological Writings, 38; LW 29: 117-18; WA 57/III: 107.16-108.3 (1517-1518 Hebrews Commentary).

⁴ De Roo, Cries of Victims, 66.

Third, for Luther, the centrality of the Incarnation in the theology of the cross led to the recognition of various inversions which must occur as a result. Although Luther discussed this issue primarily with regard to theological issues, De Roo identifies this inversion as taking place, or needing to take place, in the economic and moral spheres. The fundamental inversion needed to restore justice, he argues, is that the dignity of labour must take priority over the increase of capital.¹ He writes,

Workers, human labourers, are at the mercy of capital and technology, whereas it should be the other way around: capital and technology should serve as means, not be treated as ends. In other words, we have a "moral inversion," which is a "moral disorder."²

It is crucial to note that the inversion he calls for is not so much a new direction as it is the restoration of the way instituted by God. This is made clear in his article on "Culture, Gospel Values and the Canadian Economy":

The statement [on "Ethical Reflections"] identified a moral disorder in Canadian society. This disorder was brought about by certain structures in society which reversed the God-given priority of human labour over capital. The result is endless suffering of weaker people.³

Here the theme of inversion is very explicit. An inversion of morals brings about social justice. Therefore, De Roo argues against Christian support of the socio-economic status quo. He calls for an inversion whereby ethics are again inserted into contemporary concerns and society, and the right priorities used. But it is more than a call for moral inversion. It is also a call for a reordering of the very way in which theology is done. He states:

¹ De Roo, "Does the Church Have a Role to Play in Canadian Life?" 15. See also the Social Affairs commission statement, "Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis," Do Justice! 399ff.

² *Ibid.*, 15.

³ De Roo, "Culture, Gospel Values, and the Canadian Economy," The Church and Culture since Vatican II, J. Gremillion, ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 117.

How valid is our theological and spiritual reflection when it reflects the comfort and safety of modern suburbia? Should it not rather reflect the concerns of poverty, oppression and powerlessness which are the realities of life for so many today?¹

De Roo's methodology reflects, therefore, the hermeneutical principle of the theology of the cross as Luther proposed it. God has chosen to be revealed in the suffering, marginalized One, rather than in power, success and might. This God, hidden in suffering, also calls for inversions in how we perceive both God and the priorities of society.

While there are many similarities between Luther and De Roo in their understanding of the Incarnation, there are also many differences. Luther dwells on the Incarnation of God in Christ, while De Roo moves fairly quickly from Christ's Incarnation to the need for the church to become incarnate in the world, through actions of solidarity.² Luther focused on the Christ in our midst; De Roo stresses, on the other hand, Christ as a model for the church's solidarity with humanity.

This difference is further revealed in how De Roo's phrase, "presence to people," is interpreted. It can mean God's presence to people in the historical Jesus, or it can mean God's presence to people through the church. Luther emphasizes the former, De Roo the latter. Much of this difference, however, is due to the deliberate emphasis De Roo places on addressing society as a whole rather than writing a theological treatise. In this sense, De Roo's focus is on

¹ De Roo, *Cries of Victims*, 59-60. These questions reveal that the Incarnation, with its call for inversions, has a prophetic function. As De Roo states: "We are compelled to probe, to assess the social structures that cause such human suffering. Unless this is done, the churches can fall into the trap of legitimizing social and economic crises by unwittingly soothing the consciences of the powerful and appearing to bless the established order. Christians have a prophetic role, one shared with our Jewish brothers and sisters, of proclaiming the judgements of the God of justice who hears the cries of the poor." *Ibid.*, 62.

² *Ibid.*, 17-18.

natural law and the general revelation of God that is common to all, rather than on Christology and the special revelation it contains. If De Roo were to develop the theological implications further, however, there are some questions that would be helpful for him to address. For example, what are the implications of Christ in our midst? Is "presence to people" the methodological "starting point" for dealing with society, the theological starting point, or both? Does this presence to people refer to human solidarity with the marginalized as the basis for socio-political critiques, to Christ's Incarnation as the basis from which theology must operate, including theology's interpretation of society, or both of these? While De Roo does not address these questions, it would be interesting to see how he would respond.

From the perspective of Luther's theology of the cross, it could be argued that De Roo does not make enough connections between the theological aspects of the Incarnation of Christ and the perspective this gives to an analysis of society. He settles instead for the implications of the church's presence with people, using Christ as a model. On the other hand, Luther can be criticized for not developing the socio-economic-political implications of his theology of the cross. This does not mean, however, that the theology of the cross cannot address these issues.

Finally, because of his concern to address society from the perspective of social morals (in Luther's terms, the natural law), rather than addressing theology, De Roo does not discuss the fact that the cross is a result of the Incarnation. Nevertheless, it is something that would need to be addressed in any development of his theological underpinnings. As a result of God's decision to take on the nature of the marginalized and to enter into solidarity with those in society who are struggling, the cross appears. One of the reasons for Jesus' death, on a political level, was the "class" of people whom God in Christ chose to be associated with. He died on the cross because the powerful in his society did not appreciate his preference for the marginalized.

Entering into solidarity with marginalized groups does not always guarantee a transformation in the situation. Shattered hopes and crosses are just as likely to be the outcome of the Incarnation as social transformations, for both Christ and for all those who would dare to follow him.

B. Dealing Honestly with Reality

The second integral aspect to Luther's theology of the cross is the concern to deal with reality in an honest way. For De Roo, this same concern is clearly evident in his critique of the present economic system because of the way in which it marginalizes various segments of society. The second and third steps in the methodology which he has chosen to follow involves "looking deeply at the reality that people live, and then applying the Gospel and making moral judgements about the situation."¹ This social and theological analysis has three main aspects to it: the definition of reality and who defines it; the definition of what it means to be human, both in relationship to God and to our neighbour; and the realities of the present economic system and the problem of structural and social sin.

Who defines reality? Whose voices do we listen to, and whose perspective do we rely on to interpret society? De Roo suggests that what so often happens is that the

dominant culture tends to view life through the eyes of the influential and wealthy who have the power of defining reality. . . . business leaders, bankers, corporation heads and media directors very much determine how the rest of us interpret our reality.²

¹ De Roo, "Does the Church Have a Role to Play in Canadian Life?" 11.

² De Roo, Cries of Victims, 20.

The question of who defines reality is also the "first test of whether the church is genuinely open to compassionate, reconciling service."¹ One must ask, therefore, whether the church listens to the "victims of society--the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized, the powerless--in order to understand the values, the dreams and the failures of that society."² The voices that are listened to determine one's view of reality. It is a "standard by which we can evaluate and judge ourselves as to how we, through our government, our corporations and our economy, exploit the poor, both here at home and in the Third World."³ Because of the preferences revealed in the Incarnation and its emphasis on solidarity and compassion, De Roo argues that it is through the eyes of the marginalized that we must view and define reality. It is difficult, however, to learn to define reality from this perspective:

conditioned as I am by my own environment, I know how difficult it is for me to be critical of my own experience, of my own culture. So I need a different perspective, a critical set of criteria. . .⁴

An inversion is called for, therefore, an inversion which does not come naturally. Nor is the inversion that is needed always obvious to all. To discern and address which inversions are actually beneficial to all people rather than to only an elite, therefore, social analysis is needed:

"Social analysis" means taking a dynamic look at what is actually happening; coming to experience reality, not just from a superficial perspective, but from the very heart of that experience.⁵

¹ De Roo, Cries of Victims, 134.

² *Ibid.*, 134-5.

³ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

⁴ De Roo, "Women in the Church: Challenge for the Future," 18.

⁵ De Roo, "Does the Church Have a Role to Play in Canadian Life?" 13.

The question of what it means to be human is a second way of addressing the issue of how to deal honestly with reality. For De Roo and the Canadian Catholic bishops, a fundamental aspect of being human is to be in the image of God.¹ This involves, in his mind, being a co-creator with God, and sharing in the responsibilities on this planet.²

While one image of what it means to be human is based on the "image of God," this image is fraught with dangers. De Roo is careful to point out that unlike God, humans have limitations. While Luther warned that "we are to be human and not God,"³ De Roo notes that there comes a point when we must say, "Here lies the boundary of the sacred; here is where human beings should cease to play God."⁴ Thus, all forms of idolatry, whereby people set up institutions or ideologies as absolutes, must be opposed. The absolute claims made by authoritarian and totalitarian ideologies must be relativized.⁵ For example, De Roo suggests that Dene Chief Frank T'Seleie pinpoints one such possible form of idolatry when he states, "...maybe money has become so important to you that you are losing your own humanity."⁶ De Roo goes on to name many of the idols that our society lust after as a result of wrongly placed

¹ De Roo, Cries of Victims, 67.

² De Roo, "Collegiality and the Petrine Office in the Pastoral Work of the Church," Catholic Theological Society of America: Proceedings 1970, L. Salm, ed. (n.p.), 36. See also Cries of Victims, 78.

³ LW 49: 337; WABr 5: 415.41-6 (Letter to George Spalatin, June 30, 1530).

⁴ De Roo, Cries of Victims, 115.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁶ Address given to the Mackenzie Pipeline Inquiry, August 5, 1975, Dene Nation--The Colony Within, Mel Watkins, ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 15-16. Quoted by De Roo in Cries of Victims, 121.

priorities. He argues that the nuclear bomb is the chief symbol of this idolatry,¹ while listing the all-consuming focus on high technology and capital,² and even the economy³ as other idols.

He states,

The question is whether economic and business priorities are to be the lords and masters of our lives, so misshaping our society and warping the human person that we begin to believe happiness is impossible without two cars and the latest fashions but perfectly possible with rampant unemployment, cultural oppression and environmental pollution.⁴

There is a reason for recognizing and naming these idols in society, since our idols reveal our images of God. The image of God which economics and business portray is of a God who rewards success. In Luther's terms, this image of God is based on a theology of glory. God becomes associated with the successful, the influential, and the powerful. In the implicit theology of glory which De Roo recognizes as operative in Canadian society, this God of success has no time for those marginalized by economic policies or high technology. This theology of glory follows a policy of the survival of the fittest,⁵ rather than caring for and showing compassion to the victimized.

On the other hand, the implicit theology of the cross which De Roo upholds is one which states that to be human, to be the people of God in its fullest meaning, involves operating from

¹ De Roo, Cries of Victims, 111.

² *Ibid.*, 43, 47.

³ De Roo, "Culture, Gospel Values, and the Canadian Economy," 134.

⁴ De Roo, Cries of Victims, 131

⁵ De Roo discusses this theme in Cries of Victims, 149. It also occurs in the document, "Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis," Do Justice!, 403. The Social Affairs Commission argues that it has become the "supreme law" of economics, increasing the domination of the weak by the strong, while "increasing the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few."

a preferential option for the poor. It is to care for the marginalized, as Jesus states in Matthew 5:1-12; 25:40, and Luke 4:16-19.¹

De Roo also has much in common with Luther in his recognition that to be human means to be involved in the struggles and suffering of people. We are called "to suffer with people, not to just take pity on them from a distance, but to actually live with them, the sufferings that they go through, and out of that develop a living and vital solidarity."² From this perspective, to be fully human, both individually and as a community, means to be involved in the uncertainties of life. De Roo recognizes the need for this uncertainty in our faith: "The irreducible tensions between universal and particular, unity and pluralism, primacy and collegiality, may well be divine instruments for keeping the church alive and healthy."³ But the need to live "between the tensions" present in life goes far beyond the confines of the church. The common tendency for our society is to revert to "law and order," to support the status quo, rather than live within this tension: "What it means is security at any cost for the sake of those who benefit from the status quo."⁴ Security obtained by the supporters of the status quo, however, has disastrous results: the marginalization and misery of the poorer majority of people.⁵

Another aspect of the theology of the cross is that there is no guarantee of success in the midst of these tensions. Christians have no special "hotlines to God."⁶ There is a certain

¹ De Roo, Cries of Victims, 15-16, 20-21,

² De Roo, "Does the Church Have a Role to Play in Canadian Life?" 12.

³ De Roo, "Collegiality and the Petrine Office," 51-2.

⁴ De Roo, Cries of Victims, 144-5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁶ *Ibid.*

amount of risk involved, a risk which De Roo traces back to the methodology inherent in the Incarnation:

Adopting an incarnational approach means, even at the risk of failure, a willingness to work in our world in order to move and shape it. We will dirty our hands, make mistakes, take risks.¹

A helpful way to describe this life of "lived solidarity," is a pilgrim journey. Pilgrim people are those to whom the future is always open, always unknown. It has not been already decided. It is to live from day to day, in the midst of the uncertainties of life, trusting in God to provide the "manna and quail" in the wilderness. This involves giving up security, entering the unknown, and taking risks.² In this regard, there are many similarities with Luther's theology of the cross. In one of Luther's last recorded words, he is said to have written down these words on a scrap of paper shortly before he died: "*Wir sind Bettler; hoc est verum*" (We are beggars, that is true).³ To live as beggars is to live lives of insecurity, of risk, and of trust. It is to live in a way that is different from the mainstream of society. Althaus defined it as a "theology of *Anfechtung*,"⁴ while De Roo independently arrives at a similar understanding:

The human temptation is to view reality from a static, limited, narrow perspective. Humanity is always in need of new vision, another perspective, a change of focus. To be human means to grow, adapt, change--partly because

¹ De Roo, Cries of Victims, 78.

² Ibid, 79. De Roo also recognizes that this recognition that we are a pilgrim people stems from an incarnational theology.

³ LW 54: 476; WATr 5: 318.2-3, no. 5677 (February 16, 1546). Heinrich Bornkamm deals with the passage in his work, Luther's World of Thought (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), 291. This phrase is a favourite one of Douglas John Hall, who develops from it what he calls "a theology of beggars." Lighten our Darkness: Toward an Indigenous Theology of the Cross (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 117-23.

⁴ Paul Althaus, The Theology of Martin Luther, Robert C. Schultz, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 34.

situations and contexts change, partly because our actions and opinions reflect the insights and the prejudices of a particular time and place.¹

De Roo's theology of *Anfechtung*, therefore, means seeking an alternate vision in the midst of a society which scorns all alternatives.

The third part of dealing honestly with reality involves being honest with the reality of society. This is the overarching theme of De Roo's thought. It involves solidarity with those who are most adversely affected by the present economic policies:

It is the poor who open our eyes to the fact that something is wrong. The impoverished, the handicapped, the wounded of this world can open our eyes to the needs and injustices of society, to the sinful structures and systems that surround us.²

It is at this point that De Roo raises a crucial point; that behind these social injustices there are sinful social structures. This injustice is caused by more than the moral evils attributed to individuals; it is an integral part of the social structures of society.³ To deal only with individual sin, and to see it as the only source of the problem, would lead to solutions that are too simplistic and even unrealistic. The full realities of life, including the social structures of sin, must be faced. The cross, the very source of pain and injustice, will have been avoided if the social structures of sin are not dealt with. For example, De Roo argues that while the network of social services for the poor and marginalized may be developed and strongly supported by Canadians, the welfare system that results increases alienation and dependency, rather than dealing with the root of the problem. In agreement with William Ryan (who has a doctorate in economics from Harvard), De Roo argues that "bigger handouts are not the answer. The only acceptable . . .

¹ De Roo, *Cries of Victims*, 76.

² *Ibid.*, 59.

³ *Ibid.*, 88-9. See also 62-3.

answer . . . is to provide more worthwhile jobs."¹ Only if the structural realities of our society are revealed, will there be a chance for true justice. Until this is recognized, helpful and useful solutions cannot be developed.

The need to face up to the reality of structural sin before helpful solutions can be dealt with should not cover up the danger from the other extreme, however. It is precisely because of the social structures of sin that any proposed solution or means of hope must be tested to see if all that it offers is a way to avoid the reality of life and what it means to be human. Carl Braaten identifies this problem when he states,

The theology of the cross debunks every ideology that claims that the original sin that infects all humanity will be removed as a result of structural changes in the world wrought by human praxis. The redemptive energies of God do work in history to make changes also of a structural kind, but these changes do not remove the roots of sin in the infrastructure of human life.²

Any suggestion that this can be done would be an attempt to exchange the pilgrimage journey for that of a life of security, and would therefore be a theology of glory. Again, De Roo is aware of this danger, as revealed in the transcript of the discussion about his comments on the 1983 "Ethical Reflections" document by the Social Affairs Committee of the CCCB. The recording secretary of the discussion noted it this way:

[De Roo] recalled Paulo Freire's warning that the greater challenge is not making revolution, but rather how to keep the newly empowered (formerly marginalized) from becoming the dominant class after successful revolution.³

¹ De Roo, Cries of Victims, 41.

² Carl E. Braaten, The Apostolic Imperative: Nature and Aim of the Church's Mission and Ministry (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985), 101-2.

³ "Discussion Group Three," The Church and Culture since Vatican II, 136. (This discussion was based on De Roo's paper, "Culture, Gospel Values, and the Canadian Economy").

In other words, the danger that De Roo recognizes is that, in Luther's terms, the theology of the cross--with its inherent tensions and pilgrimage emphasis--will be replaced by a theology of glory, where the formerly marginalized will set up their own status quo, complete with their own sinful social structures.

While both De Roo and Luther are in agreement in their demands that the realities of society are faced, there are also some subtle differences, based on their interpretation of who practices a theology of glory. In Luther's view, the scholastic theologians he read were the main pursuers of the theology of glory. For De Roo, however, it is primarily the dominant culture in society which has followed the lure of success, power and wealth. He further interprets the role of the church as an agent of solidarity which fights against the blatant support of a status quo determined by the successful. Thus, while Luther directed his criticisms against those who abused the church's hierarchical structures and acted contrary to a theology of the cross, De Roo directs his criticism mainly at those in society who abuse their power or position. Even though De Roo has some stern words to say about the church--especially in regards to its authoritarian stance and its reluctance to consider the full equality of women in the ministry of the church¹--it is not his primary concern.

C. Application to Church and Society

De Roo, following the guidelines set out in the 1976 Labour Day Message by the Catholic Bishops, states that the first practical step in transforming society is "to understand the

¹ De Roo, "Women in the Church," 22-25.

true meaning of justice in the gospel."¹ This is the task of the theological disciplines. But De Roo makes it clear that theology is to be done for the sake of society. Theology is not to be seen only as a speculation about what God is like in the heavens; rather, theology is to have practical consequences. Thus, while it is important for the church to do theology, it must undertake the theological endeavour in ways which are practical and relevant to both church and society.² Otherwise the church will not be an integral part of human life on either a social or a personal level.

One of the important results of Vatican II is that the Catholic Church moved from a position of relative isolation in the world to one of seeking to be intimately involved in society. This revealed a new commitment to the world, which De Roo attributes to the incarnational and solidarity theology which had developed.³ But it is also reflective of the emphasis on theology having something worthwhile to say to society. This new theological emphasis has meant that a broader definition of church and of the mission of the church in society has developed. The people of God are not to isolate themselves from the problems and struggles in society, or focus only on the glorious attributes of the God in the heavens. Rather, the church must become, in the words of Pope Paul VI, "deeply committed to the study of the modern world."⁴ In Luther's terms, the theology of glory needs to be replaced by a theology of the Incarnation and of the

¹ De Roo, Cries of Victims, 90. The 1976 Labour Day message by the Administrative Board of the Canadian Catholic Conference, entitled "From Words to Action: On Christian Political and Social Responsibility", Do Justice! 314-321.

² De Roo, "Does the Church Have a Role to Play in Canadian Life?" 10-11.

³ De Roo, Cries of Victims, 72-78.

⁴ Pope Paul VI, in his closing remarks at the end of the Second Vatican Council. Council Daybook, Volume 3, Floyd Anderson, ed., (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1965-1966), 360. Quoted by De Roo in Cries of Victims, 76.

cross. No longer is the goal of the church to merely "gain converts" or "save their souls" or even withdrawal from the world in quest of holiness. The model of the church which De Roo emphasizes is one that calls Christians to enter into the struggles of the world and to become servants seeking change.¹

One of the results of this change in the understanding of the church and this commitment to the world could be described as a renewed emphasis on what Luther called the "priesthood of all believers." The ministry of all the baptized is to be taken seriously. As De Roo notes, "All Christians by their baptism and confirmation are called to minister."² All Christians--not just the laity--are servants, based on the model of Jesus Christ. The temptation has always been, however, to reject the role of servanthood and seek instead authority and power, thereby following a theology of glory. As De Roo reflected back on the Roman Catholic Church before Vatican II, he concludes that a servanthood approach was not always present. This began to change, however. As he says, "A 'hierarchology', which is what we really had in those days, centred on church structures and canon law, gave way to a renewed ecclesiology based on baptism."³ His inherent theology of the cross shines through in his discussion of the role of women in the church when he states:

Full equality in the church will not be achieved without enduring the mystery of the Cross. The kenosis required will test our compassion, our ability to maintain

¹ This theme is reflected, for example, by De Roo in "Exploring the Canadian Experience," Proceedings of the Institute for Christian Life in Canada Conference, 1977, 13.

² De Roo, Cries of Victims, 16.

³ De Roo, "Women in the Church," 13. De Roo also comments extensively on the movement away from a "hierarchology" and a "paternalistic structure" and toward a model of collegiality in "Collegiality and the Petrine Office," 42-3, 52-3.

Christian love in the midst of suffering. But the journey itself is already its own reward.¹

Another result of the theology of the "priesthood of all believers" is that the "church must avoid claiming unnecessary privileges and exemptions."² These advantages reflect a theology of glory, where God is expected to reward those who are faithful by taking them out of the struggles the rest of the world is involved in. This would be a rejection of solidarity with the poor and the marginalized.

A second implication of the theology of the cross is that many of the boundaries between sacred and profane are erased. This fact is clearly recognized by De Roo: "Incarnational theology concludes there is to be no rigid separation between spiritual and temporal, between worship and work. We are to make our lived experience one with our spiritual experience."³ Any attempt to keep Christ, or the Christian message which the church proclaims, from any area of public life in which we live is a denunciation of the Incarnation. As De Roo states, "All social reality is the church's responsibility because all of life is to be redeemed and sanctified."⁴ The profound interaction between faith and the culture in which it is manifested and proclaimed must

¹ De Roo, "Women in the Church," 25. Note how De Roo stresses the journey itself, rather than success in the journey, as the reward.

² De Roo, Cries of Victims, 116.

³ Ibid., 77. He also argues that the basic message of "Ethical Reflections" is that "the Christian gospel challenges the very basis of human life, not simply the individual heart and soul but the cultural shape of the human community." Ibid., 93-4. Elsewhere, he calls for the development of a "theology of profane values." Idem., "Collegiality and the Petrine Office," 49ff. See also Cries of Victims, 112.

⁴ Ibid., 118.

therefore be recognized. An incarnational theology is contextual by its very nature.¹ Therefore, the church has a moral obligation to address those issues which affect society and to speak up in proposing creative alternatives in culture, politics and religion. Anything less would be to trivialize or deny the import of the gospel. As he states:

The most effective way today of announcing that ours is not a gospel of conversion and that we are not heralds of the kingdom's transforming power and glory is to choose economic silence within a capitalist society and to be deaf to the concerns of women or laity within the Christian community.²

Thus, De Roo understands the need for theology to be practical and involved in the everyday aspects of life. It cannot be limited to the spiritual sphere, for that sphere has been thrust into the secular world by the Incarnation.

Finally, De Roo's theology of solidarity affects one's understanding of the sacraments. The Eucharist is not just a ritual focusing only on the mystery of how bread and wine become Christ's body and blood. That would make the Eucharist irrelevant to the realities of society. Rather, the Eucharist is to be interpreted as "the total gift of [Christ's] person and life—body broken, blood poured out, in sacrificial service."³ In terms of solidarity, the Eucharist comes to mean new and meaningful things:

Sharing the bread means building coalitions, just as solidarity demands sharing the bread of life and the cup of sacrifice. The story we remember in eucharistic thanksgiving is the history of our struggle for justice and love. Eucharist becomes the celebration of the kingdom erupting in our lives, radiating the creative and salvific power of God which transforms all life—our relationships,

¹ De Roo clearly recognizes this. He states, "There is a profound interaction between faith and culture. The gospel cannot grasp the human person without involving social structures (language, family, community) as well as personal faculties, including emotions, reason and will." *Cries of Victims*, 131.

² *Ibid.*, 137.

³ *Ibid.*, 113.

our society, our environment. Communion requires a sense of common interest and shared commitment which transcends narrow interests. Communion in Christ means the formation of a true community of people committed to the transformation of their world.¹

Therefore, both baptism (by which we become members of the "priesthood of all believers" and move away from an alignment with power structures), and the Eucharist (through which we become involved in sharing the bread of life in solidarity), are ways in which an incarnational theology takes place in visible ways. They have practical significance. This approach by De Roo is very similar in this regard to the approach Luther delineates in his theology of the cross.

III. THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS AS A CHRISTOLOGY

There are many similarities between Luther and De Roo in the method they used in their theological programs. This is not the case, however, with regard to their Christological emphases. In this section the similarities and differences in the Christologies of the two theologians will be analyzed. This will be based on what Luther considered to be the significant theological and Christological themes in the theology of the cross: the hidden and revealed God; the understanding of faith; and the understanding of atonement.

¹ De Roo, Cries of Victims, 138.

A. The Hidden and Revealed God

Although De Roo does not use the terms, "hidden" or "revealed" God, his work does reflect this theme. His appeal to the preferential option for the poor reveals his understanding about where God has chosen to be hidden and revealed. As he states, "Knowledge of God, in the biblical sense of experiencing God as Parent and Liberator, is found only in solidarity with the poor and in the personal and corporate struggle for justice."¹ This knowledge of God comes about through the solidarity of the Incarnate One.² This revelation is a surprising one, however, for that is not where one would expect to find God revealed to humanity. Opposition to the theme of the "preferential option for the poor" arises, in part, from a distaste for the idea of God actually becoming incarnate among a group which society has so long excluded. For many of the influential in society--and in the churches!--the idea of God giving preferential treatment to the marginalized is ludicrous. The dominant image of God in both church and society has been of a God who rewards hard work and success, and is therefore on the side of the influential. With his support of the preferential option for the poor, however, De Roo points to a different image of God; not one of Christ the Conqueror, but rather of the suffering Christ who enters into solidarity with the marginalized.³ This shift is tantamount to hiding God from the eyes of the powerful of society.

¹ De Roo, Cries of Victims, 91.

² *Ibid.*, 20.

³ The two conflicting images of Christ, that of the Conquering Christ on the one side, and the Suffering Christ on the other, are developed further by Latin American Liberation theologians such as Ellacuria, Vidales, and Schuurman. See, for example, José Miguez-Bonino, ed., Faces of Jesus: Latin American Christologies, Robert R. Barr, trans. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984).

God's hiddenness among the marginalized also calls for an inversion in society. Thus, drastic changes are needed in order to discover God's presence which, contrary to the thought of the dominant culture in society, is hidden among the poor. While Luther argued that God is to be found in suffering, struggles, and the cross, De Roo follows a similar approach in arguing that God is to be found among the poor, the marginalized, and the injustices of society. It is the last place where people would assume an all-powerful God to be found. Yet that is where the Lord of history is revealed to us.¹

Despite the emphasis on the Incarnation and the theme of the hidden and revealed God, both De Roo and Luther are concerned to not separate the two natures of Christ. It would be easy for a theology which emphasizes the solidarity of Jesus with the people to separate his divinity from his humanity. But De Roo refuses to fall into this trap. He speaks consistently of Jesus as the Christ or the Lord.² The God of solidarity is also the God who transcends human limitations. If this separation were to stand, it would suggest that God's very being is neither reflected nor revealed in the incarnational solidarity that is found in Jesus the Christ. De Roo wants to stress, however, that this solidarity revealed in Jesus is in fact a revelation of the solidarity *of God*. Solidarity with the poor is a fundamental aspect of the character *of God*. This suggests that Christology is central to any revelation of God. Unless God's self-revelation can be grasped in terms of Christ's solidarity with the oppressed, an unbalanced Christology will occur.

There are also differences between Luther and De Roo in their use of the image of the hidden and revealed God. While Luther revelled in this imagery, this theme is only implicitly

¹ De Roo, Cries of Victims, 66.

² *Ibid.*, 153. See also "Women in the Church," 20.

found in De Roo.¹ De Roo assumes that people can easily recognize the Incarnation as the place where God is to be found. God is not so much hidden in the Incarnation as revealed. But for Luther, that would miss the import of the radicalness of the Incarnation. People do not look to the Incarnation for their images of God; they look into the heavens. It is only by faith that one's eyes are directed to this earth, and to the person of Christ on the cross. If the Incarnation, with its strong emphasis on solidarity, were such an apparent revelation of God's self, why then does the idea of God's preferential option for the poor cause such an uproar, even in the church? Is it not because the solidarity image of God has been hidden from their eyes? It is not obvious to all that Christ has chosen to dwell with the poor. And it is more than a matter of education. It is a matter of faith. It is more than a matter of morals that the church should be involved in the plight of the poor; it is a matter of revelation and our very images of God with which we operate in the church.

¹ Much of this difference can be attributed to Luther's penchant for stressing the paradoxes in Christianity: that of the saint/sinner, the alien/ proper works of God, and the hidden/revealed God, to name a few. The full truth cannot be captured by any one point along its full spectrum. De Roo, however, does not make use of these paradoxes. He does talk about paradoxes, but they are restricted to historical, cultural, economic, social, political and religious spheres. But even the paradoxes in the religious spheres do not explore the "theological" paradoxes as Luther does. See De Roo, "Exploring the Canadian Experience," 3. Gregory Baum prefers to call these paradoxes in Canadian society "contradictions," in "Survival of Canada and the Christian Church," Conference on The Survival of Canada and the Christian Church (Toronto: The Ecumenical Institute, 1973), 3-7. The Canadian Catholic Conference also refers to the contradictions within Canadian society, in "On the Occasion of the Hundredth Year of Confederation," *Do Justice!* 122-34. See also Louise LeBlanc, "The Church and Reconciliation," Conference on the Survival of Canada and the Christian Church (Toronto: The Ecumenical Institute, 1973), 30-45. LeBlanc refers to the paradoxes inherent in society as "tensions."

B. The Understanding of Faith

Luther consistently emphasized that faith was not only a *via negativa*. It also includes a *via positiva*. The same thing is true in De Roo's writings. Faith in Christ, which he often refers to as an "incarnational faith," calls one to enter into the sufferings of Christ and into the sufferings of humanity, to face up to the darkness which it reveals. But faith also calls for change. It calls for people to go through the darkness in order to enter into the light. Even though the darkness cannot or should not be avoided, faith in Christ is such that it refuses to dwell there. Christ moved from death to life; from darkness into the light. De Roo follows this theme as well. An incarnational faith is one which calls for people to trust in God and to work to bring about changes in our world, and not to settle for the status quo imposed by the dominant culture in our society.¹ Listening to the voices of the oppressed does not involve merely a voluntary giving up of power as one enters into solidarity. Rather, an incarnational faith also involves working from within this solidarity and in the midst of this apparent weakness and vulnerability, empowering people through the Spirit of God to make changes.

Luther also argued that faith is a trusting in God, even in the midst of uncertainty. This is also a theme in De Roo's works. An incarnational faith means an absence of security. Instead, faith is seen as the trust in God which allows for, and even entails, an open future. This open future has no guarantees. In a classic description of faith, De Roo states:

Christian faith involves being immersed into the life and death of Jesus Christ: immersion into personal conviction (including those "invisible" Christians who have been "baptized by desire," as it was customarily expressed): immersion into a witness of courage and suffering; . . . immersion into the Christian community—marked by formal initiation and the waters of baptism. Faith is more than "belief." It is an inner change of heart and an outward thrust of personal commitment. . . . It is a life project for each of us individually and all of us

¹ De Roo, Cries of Victims, 78-9.

collectively as a pilgrim people, a mission of transformation in which everyone has a special gift and a personal responsibility.¹

Faith has an eschatological aspect to it, an open future, precisely because it does not focus primarily on believing the right doctrines, but rather on trust in Christ and trust in the hope that he promises. It involves an immersion into the suffering of Christ and thus the suffering of humanity as well. In that sense it offers no security and no guarantees of a successful outcome. All that it offers is the presence of the Christ, who is to be found hidden among those who suffer. As De Roo states,

. . . we are crucified to the world through the cross of Christ (Galatians 6:14). Faith must be lived, as Pope John Paul II reminded Canadians during his 1984 visit. It must be incarnated in daily life so that it can evangelize our culture and transform our world.²

Faith is not a clinging to the security of a promised heaven at the cost of escaping from the realities of the present. The theme of Incarnation in De Roo's Christology, therefore, determines his faith perspective.

C. The Understanding of Atonement

It is not surprising that because of their strong accent on the Incarnation, both De Roo and Luther perceive atonement as something that results from God being present in the struggles of this world. The theme of "God-with-us" plays a role in their understanding of atonement. It is because of God's intimate presence with those who are suffering that they are liberated. "There, among the wretched of the earth, God's plan of liberation is discovered and salvation

¹ De Roo, Cries of Victims, 17.

² *Ibid.*, 22.

history made manifest."¹ Atonement through God's presence with us in Christ is further reflected in the way in which De Roo applies it. Our source of hope, and the strength needed for transforming society, comes through solidarity with the poor.

This emphasis on solidarity, of "God-with-us," flows very naturally from an Incarnational theology. It is God's presence in our midst that empowers and encourages us to hope for a better future. It reveals a commitment to humanity on God's behalf, especially when the Incarnation is understood as the revelation of God's very self. It also provides an example: Christ is the model which we can follow in discovering what it means to be human and what it means to be the church in this world -- "working and struggling with the human world as it is."² De Roo appears to be well aware of these strengths, and capitalizes on them.

While Luther recognizes the importance of salvation coming about through God's presence with people, he was also aware of the need to recognize that ultimately it must be understood that it is only by God acting "for-us," doing what we cannot do, that we are justified in the presence of God. De Roo also reflects this tradition when he states, "God is the source of justice, the One who renders us just, who liberates us by destroying our false gods, whether they be power, wealth or prestige."³ Here it is not so much God being with us that is stressed as God acting for us. God's actions in atonement are of ultimate importance. They set us free to enter into solidarity with others who have been marginalized. However, in De Roo's solidarity theology, this theme of "God-for-us," so prominent in Luther, plays a minor role compared to the emphasis on "God-with-us."

¹ De Roo, Cries of Victims, 66. see also 91.

² Ibid., 18; see also 20, 79, 96.

³ Ibid., 21.

This approach by De Roo is not without its difficulties. One is that the resulting view of Christ as "model" can easily develop into a subtle works righteousness. By "imitating" Christ, people may assume that they may become more acceptable to God and more worthy of salvation. Unless the Spirit of God has guided a person to grasp that God has chosen to be hidden and simultaneously revealed among the poor and the suffering, even the decision to opt for the side of the poor can be understood as a human decision, made to win God's favour. In effect, such an opting for the marginalized could be construed as a way to climb up the ladder into heaven. This mentality would reveal an abuse of the preferential option for the poor, using it as a stepping stone to heaven rather than as a true concern and compassion for the poor and suffering.

The second difficulty in the "God-with-us" approach is that by acting only in solidarity with people, limitations are placed upon God's redemptive powers. All empowerment by God occurs internally, through God's presence. While it is true that in one sense the Incarnation reflects a similar limiting of God's power, it would be wrong, as Luther insisted, to make the Incarnation the exclusive means by which God has chosen to be revealed.¹ That would be too restrictive. This is also the case here. The Exodus story reveals a God who is involved with and suffers with the people of Israel; but it also reveals a God who acts in a mighty way to free the people from Egyptian captivity. God brings about salvation, therefore, both by being with people in solidarity (an "internal" action of God), and through doing what people were unable to do (an act of God "external" to us).² Such is also the case today. God does indeed redeem humanity

¹ For example, Vercruyse leans toward making this mistake in interpreting Luther. Joseph E. Vercruyse, "Luther's Theology of the Cross at the time of the Heidelberg Disputation," *Gregorianum* 57 (1976), 545-6.

² This internal/external approach has many similarities to the subjective/objective atonement theories of classical Christology. As is commonly noted, no one atonement theory is complete
(continued...)

and creation through an entering into solidarity with us. This solidarity empowers us and helps us to work together for transformation of both our situation and of society at large. It is needed for moral support and sustenance in the struggles of humanity. A native leader recognized this when he said, "Don't walk ahead of us, we may not follow; don't walk behind us where you are not seen; walk beside us in solidarity."¹ Even though he was referring to the church, these comments are equally applicable to God. We also need, however, a God who can liberate us when all our powers fall short, when we have reached the end of our strength. It is God alone who can bring down the rulers from their thrones (Luke 1:52).² It is an action of God rather than a human action that brings about liberation, atonement and salvation—even if people are acting in solidarity with one another and with God. *Sola gratia, sola fides, and solus Christus* are more than nice, religious sounding phrases. At times Christ must go before us, doing what we cannot do, and not just walk beside us in solidarity. As Moltmann has incisively noted, it is not solidarity alone that defines a Christian, for others (fortunately!) also exhibit this solidarity.³ It is crucial, of course; but also vital is the faith and trust that God in Christ has acted on the cross decisively for us and for our world.

²(...continued)

in itself; they all give only images, or pictures of the mystery involved in atonement. Nor should this approach be confused with the classical *opera Dei ad intra/opera Dei ad extra* distinction, which classifies God's work according to whether the work takes place within the Godhead itself, or whether it is directed outside the Godhead. In the present approach given above, the concern is whether the work of salvation is accomplished within or outside of solidarity.

¹ As quoted in De Roo, Cries of Victims, 118.

² See here Luther's comments in LW 21: 343-5; WA 7: 589-91 (Sermon on the Magnificat, 1521).

³ Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology, R. A. Wilson and John Bowden, trans. (London: SCM Press; and New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 13.

IV. CONCLUSION

In evaluating the political theology of De Roo from the perspective of Luther's theology of the cross, it becomes evident that there are many points of similarity between them. There are also some areas in which they differ. While De Roo does not use the term "theology of the cross," nevertheless it can be argued that in many ways a theology of the cross is evident in his work. His concern for solidarity, dealing with reality, and the need for faith to be practically involved in society and in its transformation reflects a similar hermeneutical method to that of Luther. Although their "theologies of the cross" address different concerns, depending on what they determine as the dominant contextual crisis, the approach used is similar. The analysis of De Roo's political theology based on the methodology and theological content of Luther's theology of the cross suggest several important points that should be considered.

First, while both De Roo and Luther emphasize the importance of the Incarnation, they perceive its importance in different ways. For Luther, the Incarnation is first of all a revelation of the God who is simultaneously a revealing and concealing God. The Incarnation is therefore primarily a theological statement for Luther. On the other hand, the primary purpose of the Incarnation for De Roo is to reveal God's commitment to the world and therefore a model of solidarity for the church. It is the methodological starting point, as well as the primary example for a theology that is not afraid to take the world seriously. These differences between De Roo and Luther concerning the Incarnation are further revealed in their target audiences. Luther, addressing theologians in the church who preferred to speculate on the God in the heavens, challenged them with the image of God revealed in the Incarnation. Thus, the Christological implications of the Incarnation became Luther's main focus of attention. On the other hand, De

Roo seeks to address society rather than theologians. Consequently, the methodological implications of the Incarnation, especially its emphasis on solidarity with the marginalized, are his main concerns. De Roo and Luther are addressing different audiences and different contexts.

Second, as a result of their different audiences and contexts, the political theology of De Roo and the theology of the cross espoused by Luther have distinctive accents in their theories of atonement. With his overarching concern to emphasize the fact that one is made righteous in God's presence by an act of God's grace alone, Luther obviously stressed the theme of God acting for humanity. Yet his stress on the Incarnation also led him to emphasize that God brings about salvation by being with us. Both the God-for-us and God-with-us aspects of atonement therefore are to be found in his theology of the cross.

De Roo, however, with his overriding focus on the Incarnation as solidarity, understandably is more concerned with the theme of God-with-us in his description of atonement. In a world where people feel alienation and despair, and where God appears to be watching humanity only from a distance, the good news is most acutely portrayed by the proclamation that God dwells with us. His primary concern, therefore, is not with the Christological and theological implications of his "solidarity" theology, but what the Incarnation means for those who have been marginalized. Nevertheless, De Roo recognizes that both atonement themes need to be present in political theology if it is to be a transforming theology that is Christian. If the theme of "God-for-us" is overlooked, what results is a "compassion" atonement theory that lacks an external force for liberation. Conversely, if the "God-with-us" aspect of atonement is forgotten, one is left with a distant, juridical atonement theory that lacks compassion and which overlooks the Incarnation. Atonement then can take place in the heavens apart from humanity. The human sphere of activity is all but forgotten.

If De Roo were to turn his attention to further developing the theological or Christological aspects of his political theology, there are some specific areas where the theology of the cross as Luther outlined it could provide him with some good foundational themes from which to begin. One such theme concerns the concealing/revealing image of God as most clearly found in Christ. It is primarily through Christ's suffering and the cross that God wants to be known. The Incarnation is a shattering revelation of God's self. This perspective, offered by the theology of the cross, could consistently strengthen political theology. God's entering into solidarity would then become not merely a model to follow, but a statement or basis for God's very nature. This radically new perception of God leads to radically new perspectives of society. Solidarity with the marginalized, then, is not one of many themes of Christianity; it is God's chosen means of self revelation. It is the primary way in which God wants to be known. The Incarnation does not simply reveal the preferences or nature of Jesus; it reveals the very preferences and nature of God.

Third, while Luther and De Roo develop the significance of the Incarnation in different ways, and as a result stress different aspects of atonement, these differences are not insurmountable when considered in their proper context. Luther, who was concerned with theological issues, called for inversions in one's understanding of God. For him the issue had to do with the spiritual realm. On the other hand, De Roo is concerned primarily with moral inversions and social justice. In Luther's terms, this would involve basically the temporal realm, and not the spiritual realm. Both have the same goals, but they are dealing in different realms. While Luther was not as concerned to apply his theology of the cross in a consistent way to the temporal realm, De Roo focuses mainly on this temporal realm, while giving only passing

reference to the theological issues that arise. If the two emphases were combined together, a remarkable political and theological theology of the cross would emerge.

Fourth, De Roo explicitly identifies the structural sin found in unjust social, economic and political systems. He rightly recognizes that sin is more than a problem for individuals. Not only are individuals "curved in on themselves," as Luther described it;¹ social and economic structures are also "curved in on themselves," guaranteeing the continuation of the status quo for those who benefit from it the most. Luther, on the other hand, while sceptical about trade, commerce and group causes, did not specifically identify or recognize the structural sin that exists in society. Thus, a political theology such as that espoused by De Roo could enrich and further the appropriateness of Luther's theology of the cross for contemporary society by reminding potential theologians of the cross that one of the aspects of dealing with reality is the recognition of the social structures of sin. This would prevent the theology of the cross from being merely individualistic or "privatistic," as Metz defined it.² Social, economic, cultural, gender, racial and other social issues or problems must also be addressed.

Fifth, De Roo's strength is in emphasizing that theology is political; it takes place within a community. The Christian is always in relationship; to both God and to those around her or him. While Luther also consistently understood the Christian within the context of community, he did not bring it to the forefront of his theology in the same way that De Roo does. Humanity can only be defined in relationship. Furthermore, the sort of political theology that De Roo espouses involves all members of a community in a relationship of equality. It involves, in the case of the church, laity and priest working together rather than against each other. This equality

¹ LW 25: 291; WA 56: 304.26 (1515-1516 Romans Commentary).

² Metz, Theology of the World, 110.

within community is a central tenet of political theology. It is also something that needs to be stressed continuously in contemporary theologies of the cross.

Sixth, one of the strengths of both De Roo's political theology and Luther's theology of the cross is that their theology is developed within and directed to a specific context. Luther would not have made the same impact on German society if he had called only for moral inversions. In his context, speculative theology had to be addressed, and so his context called for a theology which emphasized theological content. Likewise, De Roo's political theology, and the political theology which was expressed in the 1983 "Ethical Reflections" statement would have made little impact on society if it had been concerned with only theological content. Different contexts require different approaches. However, having said that, the theological content of De Roo's political theology would benefit by incorporating some of the strengths of Luther's theology of the cross or some other similar theological approach into his own work. This would be helpful primarily for the purpose of reminding those in the church that solidarity is not one of many "options" for Christians, but rather something that is central to one's very understanding of God. Contemporary theologians of the cross, on the other hand, would also benefit from studying the thorough application of De Roo's political theology to his specific social, economic and political context. While Luther's version of the theology of the cross had its limitations, as we have seen, a contemporary theology of the cross which incorporates many of De Roo's insights would provide a solid foundation for a political theology.

Unlike De Roo, Luther did not apply the theology of the cross in a political way-- at least not with any consistency. Nor did he interpret the Incarnation as a revelation of God's "preferential, although not exclusive, option for the poor", as does De Roo. Luther is definitely not a "liberation theologian" in the sense that is commonly understood today. Despite that, the

many parallels between his theology of the cross and De Roo's solidarity theology indicate that the theology of the cross has the potential to be a liberation theology in many respects. In the final analysis, however, the many similarities, especially with regard to method, between the *theologia crucis* of Luther and De Roo's solidarity theology suggests that a theology of the cross which is attentive to the context and realities of society can provide a firm methodological and theological basis for a contemporary political theology.

CHAPTER FIVE
HINTERLAND THEOLOGY AND THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

I. INTRODUCTION

A second contemporary theology to be evaluated in light of the theology of the cross is a political theology which emphasizes the importance of the prophetic ministry for society. This contemporary theology draws from the Biblical tradition of both the prophets of Israel and the prophetic ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. One proponent of this approach is Benjamin Smillie.

Benjamin Smillie has taught for many years as the Professor of Church and Society at St. Andrew's College in Saskatoon. An ordained minister of The United Church of Canada, his work reflects the tradition of the social gospel and the socialist movements which have existed in the Canadian prairies throughout this century. While De Roo has focused primarily on the marginalized within Canada, Smillie expands this and places a greater emphasis on Canada's marginalized or "hinterland" status in relationship to the United States. He also deals with the dichotomy between the "metropol" of central Canada and the "hinterland" Canadian prairies.¹ His focus on the elites within Canada also reveals his insistence on using a Marxian analytical method to expose or define who the poor are in our society, whom Jesus would address in his beatitudes. By using a Marxian class analysis, Smillie explicitly moves beyond De Roo's social analysis. For this reason, therefore, it is worthwhile to compare his hinterland theology with

¹ Benjamin Smillie, Beyond the Social Gospel: Church Protest on the Prairies (Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1991), 13ff.

Luther's theology of the cross in order to discover if there is an implicit theology of the cross operative in either his method or in his theological approach.

Following the pattern that has been established in the study of Luther and De Roo, Smillie's hinterland theology will be studied first in relation to its methodology, and then with regard to its Christology. Within each segment, both the similarities and differences between Smillie and Luther will be noted, using Luther's theology of the cross as the basis for this comparison.

II. THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS AS A METHODOLOGY

While De Roo's methodological approach easily lends itself to a comparison with Luther's *theologia crucis* as a hermeneutic, such is not the case with Smillie. There are many differences in method between them. Even so, there are still considerable areas of agreement which should not be overlooked. Whether these areas of agreement are numerous enough to consider his approach to be an implicit theology of the cross will be discussed after consideration of his methodology and Christology.

A. Incarnation, Cross and Solidarity

The Incarnation does not figure prominently in Smillie's work. While he does refer to Jesus as the suffering servant or Messiah in our midst,¹ the emphasis is clearly on the prophetic

¹ Smillie, "The Social Gospel in Canada: a Theological Critique," The Social Gospel in Canada, R. Allen, ed. (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1975), 339.

role, both as found in Christ and in scripture as a whole. Jesus' ministry is interpreted as a prophetic ministry.¹ As a result, the Incarnation is meant to reveal God's concern for this world.² This is the starting point and justification for his political theology and, therefore, his economic concerns. This is made clear in the emphasis he places on the prophets in scripture.³ The common theme of these prophets is their concern with the unjust economic practices of their time. Smillie would agree with Brueggemann's view that the agenda of the prophet Micah, and in fact of scripture as a whole, is "consistently economic," having to do with "access to and control of life-goods."⁴ It is this prophetic tradition, with its economic concerns, that reflects

¹ This is reflected in Smillie, "The Social Gospel in Canada," 319, 337, as well as in his article, "An Update on Liberation Theology in the Canadian Context," Festschrift: A Tribute to Dr. William Hordern, Walter Freitag, ed. (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan Press, 1985), 53, 57; See also his article, "Introduction: Theological Reflections on the Canadian Context," Political Theology in the Canadian Context, Benjamin Smillie, ed., Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, SR Supplements 11 (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982), 21, 33. Smillie portrays Jesus as the prophet *par excellence* who, by the Holy Spirit, is able to address social and economic inequalities within his society.

² "Hinterland Theology asserts that following a Creator who becomes incarnate in all facets of life implies both a radically transcendent God who judges human pretentiousness and at the same time a radically immanent God who loves the creation in its infinite variety. God's care is manifest in the Spirit of Christ empowering people in the political realm." Smillie, Beyond the Social Gospel, 27.

³ In some respects, this is similar to Thomas Muntzer's view, whereas Luther has a more Pauline approach to Scripture. Brendler writes, "Muntzer espoused a theology different from Luther's. Luther approached the Bible from a Pauline position, but Muntzer interpreted the Bible from the standpoint of the prophets and from the apocalypse." Gerhard Brendler, Martin Luther: Theology & Revolution, Claude R. Foster Jr., trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 274.

It is important to note that Smillie argues that Paul is an aristocratic or elite member of society, which is why Paul says what he does about obeying authorities. Smillie, Beyond the Social Gospel, 29.

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, "Voices of the Night--Against Justice," in Walter Brueggemann, Sharon Parks and Thomas H. Groome, To Act Justly, Love Tenderly, Walk Humbly: An Agenda for Ministers (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 8-9. These concerns can also be found in Luther's commentaries on the minor prophets. For example, in his comments on Micah 2:8-10,
(continued...)

both God's concern for this world and God's desire to address the injustices. It is not surprising, therefore, that when Smillie does refer to Jesus, he is portrayed as a prophet who addresses economic injustices, and who calls all humanity to do likewise.¹ The clearest example of this is his statement that

In Canadian society, Jesus' comment—that it is harder for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven—becomes, "It is harder and harder for a poor man to enter the kingdom of riches in Canada."²

Second, although Smillie does not stress the theme of solidarity with the economically oppressed in the way in which De Roo and Baum do, for example, this does not by any means imply that this theme is ignored. In his discussion of Liberation theologies, Smillie agrees with the "bias for the poor," and goes on to argue that "in concrete terms, this means that [Liberation theologians] analyze the economic material base which effects the living possibilities of people."³

Solidarity implies siding with the marginalized and fighting for economic justice for those who dwell in the "hinterland" rather than the "metropol" of society, whether this be defined in terms of Canadian or North American perspectives. It is the metropol which has kept the hinterlands

⁴(...continued)

he highlights the prophet's criticism of those who are consumed with a desire to acquire wealth, even to the extent of driving women from their homes and depriving children of a decent life. He labels this as violence against these women and children. LW 18: 226; WA 13: 311.38-9 (Micah Commentary, 1525).

¹ Smillie puts great prophetic and economic emphasis on the words of Jesus in Luke 4:16-19 and Matthew 6:28, for example. See Smillie, "An Update," 52-3; and Idem, "Conclusion," Benjamin Smillie, ed., Visions of the New Jerusalem: Religious Settlement on the Prairies (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1983), 189-90.

² Smillie, "Introduction," 21.

³ Smillie, "An Update," 52-3. Note here the similarities with Brueggemann, "Voices of the Night," 8.

poor; thus, solidarity involves protesting against this metropol power.¹ Solidarity, therefore, means supporting the prairies and maritimes in their economic fights with "Bay Street" and what it symbolizes in the Canadian context. It also involves being a strong Canadian nationalist with regard to its hinterland role in relation to the "metropolis" United States of America and its overwhelming economic clout.² Thus, to support the hinterland may involve supporting not just the poor.³

Smillie is wary of embracing solidarity too quickly, however. One of his main critiques of the Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops, of William Hordern and Roger Hutchinson, for example, is that they support the idea of solidarity too glibly, and without first doing a class analysis.⁴ This leads to two consequences. First, as Smillie states, "Without a class analysis to assist in identifying who is responsible for the oppression of the poor, the problem of poverty tends to be reduced from a problem of structures to one of individuals."⁵ Second, apart from a class analysis, one cannot adequately define who the poor are. Nor are the oppressors with

¹ Smillie, Beyond the Social Gospel, 125.

² Smillie, "Introduction," 1-3, 13-16; and "Canada: A Silly, Senseless Pigeon or a Holy Nation?" More Than Survival: Viewpoints Towards a Theology of Nation, Graham Scott, ed. (Don Mills, Ontario: Canec Publishing Company and Supply House, 1980), 69ff, 84-6.

³ For example, Smillie argues that during the 1970's the strongest voices of protest from the prairies came from the oil and potash industries, when the Federal government tried to take over and control these natural resources. Yet the principle was the same: the "metropol" wanted to obtain or retain the power over these industries, thereby assuring their control over the prairie provinces and insuring that the prairie provinces would remain basically suppliers of raw material while having little actual power. Smillie, Beyond the Social Gospel, 110-11.

⁴ Smillie, "An Update," 53-4.

⁵ Smillie, Beyond the Social Gospel, 16.

economic power in Canada defined.¹ To identify the poor, therefore, Smillie turns to a "Marxian analytical method", since

. . . it is the only method which clearly exposes those whom the Bible calls the "rich" and the "poor"! All other methods available to date, unfortunately, leave these identities "murkily ambiguous!"²

Another reason for refraining from endorsing solidarity uncritically, he argues, is that the Bible also contains passages which appear to condone and adulate wealth. For example, when a woman pours expensive oils over Jesus at a feast, he states that the poor will always be present, while he will not (Mark 14:7).³ This can be interpreted as a questioning of an uncritical or even misplaced solidarity with the poor. Certain conditions seem to apply. The only way to deal with this apparent paradox, therefore, is to apply an historical materialistic hermeneutic, or class analysis.⁴

The third, and most easily recognizable point of similarity between Smillie and Luther with regard to Incarnational theology is their use of inversion. This is a key term for Smillie. Abraham Rotstein, for example, discusses the similarities of the Marxian inversion called for by Smillie, with that of Luther's *theologia crucis*. He writes:

. . . out of Luther's battle with the Catholic church where, as we recall, "everything had been turned upside down," there emerged the theology of the

¹ Smillie, "An Update," 54.

² Ibid., 55. See also, Beyond the Social Gospel, 42. In using the term, "murkily ambiguous," he makes reference to Roger Hutchinson and Leon Howell, who state that issues today are "murkily ambiguous," and therefore it is unwise to take too strong a stand. Cf. Roger Hutchinson, Canada/United States Consultation, "Struggle for the Church: Ideological Forces Shaping the Future and our Faith Responses," Niagara Falls, Ontario, November 14-16, 1984. Unpublished notes from a panel discussion. Smillie refers to this in "An Update," 54.

³ Smillie, "An Update," 57.

⁴ Ibid., 57-8. He points to Norman Gottwald, Fernando Belo and George Pixley as biblical scholars who are involved in this hermeneutical approach.

cross centered on God's power as the *negativa essentia*, the power of inversion. Marx in turn regarded capitalism as "an enchanted, perverted [read "inverted"], topsy-turvy world" (*die verzauberte, verkehrte und auf den Kopf gestellte Welt*), but communism "overturns the basis of all earlier relations of production and exchange."¹

There are also subtle by significant differences here, however. Luther argues for a theological inversion with regard to our perceptions of God; De Roo argues for a "moral inversion"; and Smillie contends that there must be class inversions. Furthermore, for Luther the primary inversion occurs within the individual; for Smillie it must be an external, socio-economic inversion.² Only a Marxian class analysis can reveal the need for this inversion in society.³

This theme of inversion is also common in the prophetic tradition. The prophets called for a new way of life, a re-ordering of life in such a way that the poor would be cared for, and the constant seeking after the gods of success and materialistic possession would be abandoned.⁴ In its place is a vision of a new Jerusalem, where this inversion has occurred (e.g. Isaiah 11:6-9).

¹ Abraham Rotstein, "The Apocalyptic Tradition: Luther and Marx," Political Theology in the Canadian Context, Benjamin Smillie, ed., Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion, SR Supplements 11 (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982), 180.

² Rotstein, "Luther and Marx," 182, 186.

³ Smillie, "Introduction," 32-3; Beyond the Social Gospel, 134-6. See also Rotstein, "The Apocalyptic Tradition," 162f.

⁴ For example, he quotes Isaiah 5:8 in this regard. "Canada," 73; cf. 80ff. Brueggemann also recognises this theme in the prophets. He writes, "The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us." Walter Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 13. This stress on an alternative reveals a desire for a change, or an "inversion" of some sort to take place, an inversion that is different from the dominant culture. This inversion theme is also strong in Luther's commentary on the minor prophets.

Furthermore, Smillie sees a possibility that this inversion may be achieved in some approximate form on this earth.

B. Dealing Honestly with Reality

Smillie uses considerable energy exposing what he considers the reality of the Canadian situation. He finds parallels in this task with that of the Biblical prophets, who were constantly pointing out the realities of the condition of the Israelites, realities which the "official religion" of their society tried to cover up.¹ The prophets, therefore, were leaders of protest movements against the controlling interests of society. In the Canadian context, there is also this "official religion" which attempts to disguise the true situation in favour of one which supports the status quo; thereby stifling any criticism of the political establishment. As Smillie states,

The way the present Canadian church leadership legitimizes the economic elites of Canada, is to provide them with religious respectability. The modern Amaziahs handle the Amos type of critic by reprimanding this type of prophet for having a delictious effect on the national budgets of the church.²

Elsewhere he states,

To fulfil the role of official religion in cultural Christendom, the Canadian church has carefully limited God's activity to the spiritual realm, making only occasional sorties into the terrestrial realm in prayers of intercession to bless "all those who are set in authority over us."³

¹ Smillie, "Canada," 74-5. He refers to Amos 7:10-13, where the "domesticated priest" Amaziah is angered at the forth-telling of reality to the Israelite people. See also "Introduction," 12-16.

² Smillie, "Canada," 80. Cf. "Introduction," 16-20.

³ Smillie, "Introduction," 18. This idea of the church as the provider of the "official religion" of the economic elite is delineated by Douglas John Hall, *Lighten our Darkness* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 73-106. This characterization of the church might be questioned, however, as to its fairness and accuracy. De Roo, for example, portrays a church
(continued...)

The reason for this blind allegiance to the economic elites in our society is, according to Smillie, the failure or refusal to do a class analysis. While this step in analysis is crucial, nevertheless, the history of social protests on the prairies suggests that even without doing class analysis, people have not always accepted the notion of blindly supporting the metropol or the power structures of society.¹ These protests reveal a long tradition of not accepting things as they are. While the Social Gospel movement failed to do a class analysis, its followers were not afraid to venture into the political realm as prophets who were protesting the injustices supported by both church and the ruling society.² Unfortunately, however, what the Social Gospel did not realize was that by failing to do a class analysis, the status quo is only superficially challenged, because many of the idols in society go unrecognized. This identification of idols is a central aspect of dealing honestly with reality, and Smillie compiles a lengthy list of them. These idols are the slave-masters of Canadian society. Not surprisingly, the first idol he names is the U.S. capitalistic system. Echoing Kari Levitt, he argues that "Canada is . . . a captive nation to the United States, living in the most servile 'silent surrender'."³ The domination of our foreign policy by the United States --and even more, the economic power which U.S. based multinational corporations have in determining Canadian economic policies--indicates that we are an "economic

³(...continued)

who is in fact deliberately not limiting itself to only the spiritual realm, as evidenced by the various statements of the Social Affairs Commission of the CCCB.

¹ Smillie, Beyond the Social Gospel, 12-14.

² Ibid., 14. One of the problems with the Social Gospel, suggests Smillie, was that political involvement or protest was seen as an "extracurricular activity" rather than as something at the core of the gospel.

³ Smillie, "Canada," 71. He borrows the term "silent surrender" from Kari Levitt, Silent Surrender (Toronto: MacMillan, 1970), 53.

and political" servant of the United States, even if this bondage is, to a large extent, self-imposed.¹

A second idol which Smillie identifies is that of surplus production. This too, stems from the message of the biblical prophets. He writes, "Baal worship was in fact the worship of nature. More accurately, it was the worship of fecundity and production. It was the Old Testament version of idolizing the Gross National Product."² In its most basic form, it is the worship of mammon.³

Through a further analysis of the gods of materialism which attract us in Canada, Smillie comes to the conclusion that behind these idols is the ideological god of "liberal possessive individualism."⁴ It is a result of the "anaesthetizing slavery of prosperity," a slavery which the people of Israel were also subject to once they had taken over Canaan and became prosperous as a nation.⁵ Supported by capitalistic ideology, it has led to the pursuit--and worship!--of success. The prophets recognized this and criticized the people for "whoring after the gods of Baal," since it reduced faith to "accumulating dividends with the god who is supposed to produce plenty."⁶

¹ Smillie, "Introduction," 3.

² Ibid., 3. Cf. "Canada," 71.

³ Ibid., 6; cf. "Canada," 73. This has remarkable similarities with Luther, who noted that the accumulation of goods is "the greatest and most universal belief or religion on earth" LW 21: 12; WA 32: 306.36-7 (Sermon on the Mount, 1521).

⁴ Smillie, "Canada," 75-77. Cf. "Introduction," 8-9.

⁵ Smillie, "Canada," 71; cf. "Introduction," 5-6.

⁶ Ibid., 72; cf. "Introduction," 6.

The worship of success is also found in the churches. One critique that Smillie levels at the Social Gospel and the liberal theology it tried to implement was that it was based on the assumption that human progress toward a more just society was to be equated with the coming and final realm of God. In the process, however, the reality of human sin is overlooked. Smillie argues, for example, that Barth's stress on the transcendence of God was similar to the approach of the prophets. It is only by emphasizing the transcendence of God can a prophet become aware of their own sin and the sin of the nation. This does not occur, however, in a religion of progress.¹

This seeking after success reveals a second aspect of reality: humanity is measured according to economic success and materialist possessions. This view has become the "operative theology" of society. It is also a trademark of the theology of glory, which worships the god who grants the most success in life. As Smillie notes, "Another common feature of a utility god whose allegiance is dependant on the god's ability to provide plenty is that such a god can be easily abandoned for a more successful deity."² He further supports this claim with a reference to Adolphe Lods, who stated: "For the man of primitive mentality, the best gods are the gods of the conquerors."³

¹ Smillie, Beyond the Social Gospel, 25-6.

² Smillie, "Canada," 73; "Introduction," 8.

³ Adolphe Lods, The Prophets and the Rise of Judaism (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1937), 127. Quoted by Smillie in "Introduction," 8; and "Canada," 73. The Canadian theologian William Hordern calls this theology of glory a theology of triumphalism. As he states, "People have readily changed the deities they worship when other deities seemed better able to deliver the desired benefits. When in ancient times a nation was defeated in war, it was assumed that the only sensible thing to do was to worship the gods and goddesses of the victors since these were proven by the victory to be more powerful and effective." William Hordern, Experience and Faith: The Significance of Luther for Understanding Today's Experiential Religion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 87.

The problem with this rampant "theology of glory" in Canadian society, suggests Smillie (even if he does not name it as such), is that it leads to an increasingly larger gap between the rich and the poor in Canada. The pursuit of "upward mobility," therefore, which is a manifestation of the theology of glory, is in fact not a very real possibility for most Canadians. In fact, he considers it a myth: "One of the hoary myths in Canadian society is that we all have equal opportunity of upward social mobility: we are told that if we work hard, get a good education, the chances for 'making it' in a young country like Canada are unlimited."¹ A Marxian class analysis reveals, on the other hand, the reality of the situation: "As the class structure tightens, the idea of upward mobility in Canada's free society becomes more impossible."² Because of the role of the Canadian economic leaders as "elite middlemen," it also means that the true economic power is centred not in Canada, but rather in the U.S. multinationals. The Canadian economic "indigenous" elite are restricted primarily to the areas of finance, utilities and transportation, while the "comprador" and "parasite" elite—who hold the real economic power, and who are involved in the manufacturing and resource areas—are located outside of Canada.³

While one myth is that there is the possibility of "upward mobility" in Canada, another myth, according to Smillie, is that as a small nation, Canada needs the American economy in order to remain viable. This myth has led to Canadian dependence on the United States for most of its economic and political policies. Smillie, however, argues that the reality of the situation

¹ Smillie, "Canada," 77-8; cf. 68-9, and "Introduction," 32-3.

² Smillie, "Introduction," 21. Cf. "An Update," 55.

³ Smillie, "Introduction," 22-25; cf. "Canada," 78-80.

is that "Canada in fact has saved the United States from bankruptcy!"¹ Even though Canada could be an independent nation, free from the domination of the economic policies which a capitalistic society promotes, it has chosen to enter into a voluntary bondage, and it supports this subservient status through adopting a religion which "blesses the status quo." In doing so, Canada has become a "hinterland" of the "metropol" United States, treasured for its natural resources and the economic financing it provides.

This servant/master relationship is supported by a religion which sees the success of the elite as the stamp of divine approval. For example, Smillie refers to the work of Walter Ellis in suggesting that the

Social Gospel Baptists used the Social Gospel belief in the inherent goodness of people and the progressive march of history to justify their wealth through a form of Social Darwinism. This enabled wealthy Baptists to stand in the Social Gospel tradition and to equate their wealth with the blessing of God.²

Smillie has very clearly identified, therefore, the theology of glory that is rampant in Canadian society.

A theology of the cross, on the other hand, does not support this mentality that success is a measure of God's favour. In its call to deal with reality, a theology of the cross invites one to deal with the failures of life, those things which appear opposite to successes and triumphs. It calls people to enter into the darkness or the "cold, hard facts" about the reality of the situation, and then to deal with it, rather than either cover it up or run from it. Smillie's fondness for the prophetic tradition reveals this aspect of a theology of the cross. In fact, his insistence on a class analysis, designed to identify who the rich and the poor in Canada are,

¹ Smillie, "Introduction," 14.

² Smillie, Beyond the Social Gospel, 130.

reflects this concern. It also explains why he is critical of many social justice groups and advocates: by refusing to do this class analysis, they reflect their own class bias. Smillie comments, "Our style of life leaves us objectively closer in identity with the wealthy capitalist than with the poor with whom our theologizing wants to seek identity."¹ This unnamed reality helps us support the myth that we live in a free and democratic society, where there is equal opportunity for all.² Until society "names the powers"³ which control our society, and faces up to the reality that we do not live in a true democracy, the darkness is avoided. The role of the prophet, however, is to call people to face up to--and even enter--this darkness, so that it may be defeated and revealed for what it is. Unless the powers are correctly named before entering into solidarity with the oppressed, the actual realities of society and its darkness and oppression are avoided. Smillie does not let anyone get away with less. He even suggests that a person must face up to the reality that one's friends, co-workers, and the prophets may try to avoid the realities and struggles of life: it is not only the "enemies" who must be called to enter the darkness.⁴ The way of the cross is for everyone.

The rejection by Hinterland Theology of the success mentality found in Christianity and western society is not, unfortunately, connected by Smillie to a theology of the cross. He does, however, draw parallels between his Hinterland Theology and native spirituality. Smillie argues

¹ Smillie, "An Update," 54.

² *Ibid.*, 54.

³ The reference here is, of course, to Walter Wink, Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament, vol. 1, "The Powers," (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984). Wink argues that when powers become idolatrous (as Smillie argues here regarding economic powers), they become demonic.

⁴ Smillie, Beyond the Social Gospel, 135.

that a theology of success perceives history in a linear fashion; always progressing.¹ It is illustrated by the image of climbing Jacob's ladder.² The first one to the top is successful. Native spirituality, on the other hand, perceives history in a circular fashion: faithfulness and stewardship is stressed rather than progress. The linear model suggests competition, a success mentality, and individuality; the circle model suggests cooperation. It is impossible without community.³

A third aspect of dealing honestly with reality is disclosed in whether or not it allows an open future. In a theology of the cross, the life of faith is lived in the absence of all security, which means that the future is completely open. Smillie argues that the present situation in Canada, however, excludes this possibility. Referring to Rubem Alves, he argues that while the most obvious form of violence inherent in colonialism is exploitation (which produces poverty and underdevelopment), its most basic form of violence is that it "defuturizes the nations under its power."⁴ Such is also the case with Canada, as an economic colony of the United States. Obtaining security at the cost of giving up economic control and rights leads to a defuturized nation. The support of the status quo, even if it is destructive to the hopes of the oppressed, at least gives a sense of security.⁵ The role of the prophets, however, was to speak against this

¹ Smillie, Beyond the Social Gospel, 127-28.

² This imagery of Jacob's ladder, as used by Smillie, has many parallels with Luther's criticism of any theology of ascent. By climbing the ladder into heaven, one is either successful in "earning" personal salvation or in bringing about the Realm of God. In both cases, God appears as a spectator to the whole process, rather than the primary character. See *Ibid.*, 53.

³ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴ Smillie, "Introduction," 4. See also Rubem Alves, A Theology of Human Hope (Washington: Corpus Books, 1969), 107.

⁵ Smillie, "Introduction," 4-5.

closed future. Jeremiah goes out and buys a field just before Jerusalem is captured.¹ Isaiah poetically describes a vision of a new life. They call people to an open future, a future with promise and possibility. Only with an open future, and in the absence of a present--albeit, unjust--security, can we genuinely depend on God and have the strength to enter into the darkness of the present realities without giving up in despair.

Finally, Smillie and Luther draw similar conclusions from this; namely that to be a people who deal with the realities in an honest way is to be a pilgrim, or a remnant people. Smillie describes these pilgrims as people who both dance (which humanizes more politically oriented theology), and race (those who seek social justice and the reign of God in their midst, and are not subdued by the theology of the dominant culture).² As a remnant or a minority, the people who can deal honestly with society will be suspicious of the dominant culture which refuses to face the judgement of God as revealed by the prophets. Only in facing up to the realities of life, with all its hidden inequalities, will this remnant be able to offer a hope that is not another subtly disguised form of oppression. As prophets of society, they reveal both the injustice and the need for inversion, and the hope that those needed inversions might actually occur.

C. Application to Church and Society

It is clear from Smillie's writings that his primary concern is a theology which addresses the realities of society. Theology must be very practical, addressing issues which affect people directly. Thus, while Luther spent considerable time on the theological implications of his approach, Smillie devotes his efforts to the social and political implications of his prophetic

¹ Smillie, "The Social Gospel in Canada," 331.

² Smillie, "Conclusion," 180-84.

approach. The prophetic voices of scripture and a class analysis uncover the basic issues in society, and the ways in which the dominant culture—and the "official religion" of this dominant culture—supports and even encourages inequalities in society while pursuing a theology of glory. It is not surprising, therefore, that he has much to say about the church and the economic and political elites in society.

As previously noted, the church comes under criticism for often blindly endorsing the agenda of the economic elites in Canada. This critique is not unique to Smillie. But it does differ considerably from that of De Roo, who turns to the church's social justice statements for support, and who generally sees the church as playing a positive role in society. Smillie, however, is often sharply critical of the church, and suggests that only a remnant of it has not lost its prophetic voice.¹

Smillie suggests that the church must take five steps if it is to seriously deal with the realities of Canadian society. First, it must take seriously the biblical doctrines of creation, redemption and conversion.² No longer, he argues, can the church argue that human beings are to have domination over the earth. Stewardship of creation involves care and nurture, not enslavement.³ Second, it must do a class analysis, to reveal who the rich and poor are, and to clarify the relationship between Canadian and American society. Unless this is done, he argues, any "teaming up with the poor," or actions of solidarity, are premature.⁴ For this reason he critiques Hutchinson's approach, which suggests that concerned church groups can provide a

¹ Smillie lists some of these "remnant voices" in Beyond the Social Gospel, 129-34.

² *Ibid.*, 13-14.

³ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴ This was precisely the problem with the Social Gospel. In its quest for the "New Jerusalem," it overlooked the systemic sin in society. Smillie, Beyond the Social Gospel, 14.

"floor" on which a solidarity can be built.¹ As he states, "without a rigorous class analysis, the compromises in accommodating the views of the people who possess economic power, reduce this "floor" to quicksand!"²

The third step for the church to take is to deliberately give up its role as the official religion of the dominant society.³ This also implies that the church must exchange the role as the official priests of society for that of the prophets who speak out or protest against the dominant class of society.

The fourth step is to move away from a "success mentality" theology, or, to use Luther's terminology, a "theology of glory." As Smillie states,

This means that we do not need to develop a type of political parkinson's disease as we develop the activist twitch when our strategies are not crowned with success. So frequently church political activists live with the liberal theology hangover that if we are authentically doing his will God will prosper us. We are reminded of Jesus' call to take the pathway that involves a cross. The assurance of the resurrection is the reminder that as we take up his cross, God removes the scales of blindness from our eyes, so that although we see "through a glass darkly" we do see pathways of discipleship in Canada's Canaanite captivity.⁴

Here Smillie reflects Luther's description of faith and his understanding of what a theology of the cross implied. By giving up the security which a success theology offers, and by dealing honestly with reality rather than avoiding it, the church can have something worthwhile to say

¹ Roger Hutchinson does not actually use the term "floor" in any articles. The term itself comes from Stanley Hoffmann, Duties Beyond Borders: On the Limits and Possibilities of Ethical International Politics (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1981), 120ff. For this idea of a "common floor" in Hutchinson's works, see his article, "Ecumenical Witness in Canada: Social Action Coalitions," International Review of Mission 71 no. 283 (July 1982), 344-52; and Idem, "Towards a 'pedagogy for allies of the oppressed'," Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses 13 no. 2 (Spring 1984), 145-50.

² Smillie, "An Update," 54.

³ Smillie, "Canada," 86.

⁴ Ibid.

in Canadian society. A theology of the cross does not guarantee success; on the contrary, it calls one to be intimately involved in discipleship. In Luther's terms, it is not a theology *about* the cross, but a theology *of* the cross, a cross which is Christ's, but which also involves us.

The fifth step which the churches need to engage in is a proper confession. The church, as a remnant standing under judgement, must confess the right sins--those that are the most traumatic to confess--and not resort to "blanket statement confessions."¹ As Smillie astutely notes, "The most pernicious form of discrimination occurs when people deny individual culpability in institutional racism--of the past or of the present."² These sins differ according to the context of the people involved. They may range from the sin of wealth and corporate power obtained and supported through the marginalization of others, to the sin of refusing to enter into solidarity with those who bring judgement on the powerful. It may include the sin of being distracted by small, inconsequential things, or of forgetting to show compassion to those who are suffering.³ It is only through the prophetic voice of those who are willing to do a class analysis, however, that the appropriate sins can be honestly identified and named. Only then can the church progress beyond vague generalities. "Until the church gets beyond the theology of generalities," states Smillie, "how can it have the courage to deal with the specifics of repentance?"⁴

¹ Smillie, "Canada," 84-5.

² Smillie, Beyond the Social Gospel, 50.

³ Smillie, "Canada," 85.

⁴ Smillie, Beyond the Social Gospel, 59.

Smillie also suggests changes needed in Canadian society. First, it must move out of its bondage to the United States and the economic power of the multinationals.¹ This involves an inversion in society, of listening to the hinterland voices of protest rather than those of the metropol. Second, the tax structure in Canada must be reformed to make it fair.² The third fundamental political requirement needed, and which he considers fundamental to the mandate of the Gospel, is that Canada must "develop an economy of self-reliance."³ This would free the Canadian economy from the grip of the idolatrous multinationals-generated economy that places a higher priority on the maximization of profits than on the full employment of its people. Clearly, these are radical suggestions, but Smillie feels that they are in line with the prophetic emphases found in scripture.

III. THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS AS A CHRISTOLOGY

Smillie's works do not contain an explicit Christology. The overriding theological theme is prophetic tradition rather than Christology. This fact shows up in a comparison of the theological content between Luther and himself.

¹ Smillie, "Introduction," 3.

² Smillie, "An Update," 62.

³ Ibid.

A. The Hidden and Revealed God

One of the main theological themes in a theology of the cross for Luther was the paradox of the hidden and revealed God. One reason for this paradox is that it allowed him to place a strong emphasis on the Incarnation as the chosen revelation of God's being. Another reason, however, is that it prevents any theological system from being able to claim too quickly that they completely understand God. It preserves the concept of God as mystery.

Smillie does not have this hidden and revealed God emphasis in his work. The prophets clearly reveal the nature and the will of God. There is nothing hidden or mysterious about God's will or nature; the only thing hidden is the reality of class oppression in capitalistic societies. His focus is on the sin that has blinded us to the realities of society, not the sin blinding us to the realities of God. While he criticizes Sallie McFague for "denying the uniqueness of Jesus as the self-revelation of God,"¹ his own approach does much the same thing by limiting this self-revelation of God in Christ to Jesus' prophetic role. Such a prophetic-based revelation reveals more about human reality than it does about God. The Incarnation of God in Christ, therefore, is not understood by Smillie as a new revelation of God or of how God has chosen to be known; it is rather a prophetic voice revealing the truth of human reality. Without this hidden and revealed God emphasis, however, Smillie loses access to the Incarnation as a radical event. An appeal to the inversion in one's very understanding of God's will and nature in the Incarnation would have given Smillie a much stronger theological foundation for his social and economic inversions based on the prophetic tradition. Overlooked is the fact that one's image of God determines whether we view God as a conservative supporter of the status quo, or as a radically different God who calls for an inversion in how everything is viewed, and who opts for the

¹ Smillie, Beyond the Social Gospel, 44.

"underside" rather than the "status quo" of society. The theology of the cross, therefore, with its hidden and revealed God emphasis, could be a useful resource for Smillie.

History has also shown that the church has done some of the worst damage to its credibility when it was convinced that it knew exactly what God was like and what God's will is for this world. When one's understanding of God's will is not called into question by the cross, or by what the cross implies, then it is open to being used as a dictatorial tool. The cross asks the question as to whether the image one has of God—images often used to justify a cause on religious grounds—is correct. It is a call, therefore, for even the prophet to proclaim the message or the call for inversion in a spirit of humility rather than of "all-knowing," strident certainty. While Smillie argues that the recognition of a transcendent God plays this role in his theological approach,¹ the self-revelation of God remains for him centered on Jesus the prophet rather than on God's self-revelation on the cross.

B. The Understanding of Faith

The second main theme in Luther's theology of the cross is the understanding of faith. Here Luther and Smillie appear to have a mutual understanding. Faith is trusting in God in the absence of all security. It is believing that God will bring about the needed inversions in due time. While Smillie does not discuss faith directly, what is said indirectly reflects some of the same themes as does Luther. The main difference between Smillie and Luther is that for Smillie, faith means faith in God. Luther, however, with his Christocentric approach, consistently talks of faith in Christ. Luther's approach, because of its Incarnational stress, keeps the theology of

¹ Smillie, Beyond the Social Gospel, 26.

the cross from being susceptible to a purely "*via negativa*" interpretation.¹ No such safeguards are in place in Smillie's prophetic and inversion approach.

C. The Understanding of Atonement

The third major theme in the Christology of Luther's theology of the cross is that of atonement. It involves both an immanent God who dwells with us, and a transcendent God who acts for us. It is through this transcendence and immanence of God that people are brought into God's presence and are made righteous. While Smillie does show an awareness of the transcendent/immanent dichotomy present in theology, its implications for justification in the presence of God (*coram Deo*), does not play a major role in his work. In regard to atonement theories, he appears to take an approach opposite to that of De Roo. While De Roo stresses the idea of "God-with-us" and salvation through God's immanence, Smillie has chosen to focus more on the idea of a transcendent, judging God.² This transcendent, judging God is necessary for the prophetic tradition, as Brueggemann, echoing George Mendenhall, notes: "the social purpose of a really transcendent God is to have a court of appeal against the highest courts of society around us."³ The idea of an immanent God would defeat the prophet's claim to have spoken on behalf of an "other" standing in judgement on this present society. The immanent God espoused by those who emphasize God's solidarity with humanity is for Smillie a god who is often adopted

¹ See von Loewenich, Luther's Theology of the Cross, 106, for this emphasis in Luther.

² Smillie, "Conclusion," 188.

³ Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination, 29-30. See also George Mendenhall, "Sociology Organization in Early Israel," Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God, Frank M. Cross, Werner Lemke, and Patrick D Miller, Jr., eds. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1976), 132-151.

by the status quo, unable to act independently "for us." Thus Smillie opts for a transcendent God in the Barthian tradition, which is a God who is unwilling to be "co-opted for cultural religion."¹

From the foregoing, it is clear that De Roo and Smillie have different objectives in mind in their theological approaches. With his "immanent God approach," De Roo proclaims a God who empowers the marginalized through an act of solidarity. On the other hand, Smillie, by emphasizing the transcendence of God, seeks a God who judges the oppressors and the economic elite of Canada.

In Smillie's approach, therefore, Christ is seen primarily as a prophet, one who challenges the class structures.² He is a model for prophetic ministry. One is left to wonder, however, if that is the extent of Christ's significance for those who call themselves by his name. While Smillie suggests that one of the weaknesses of the Social Gospel was that it had a weak doctrine of God,³ there is justification for saying the same thing about his Christology. Does he have a Christology at all? With his emphasis on the prophetic ministry, what is there to differentiate his theology from that of the Jewish faith, for example, which also has a prophetic tradition? What does the cross signify, other than the expected fate of a prophet of God--or is that all it signifies? These questions point to some serious weaknesses in his work. While he criticizes a few feminist theologians for dismissing the doctrine of atonement or blaming it for the "acculturation of women to their passivity,"⁴ his own doctrine of atonement leaves much to be desired, and may be suspect to this very same criticism. Even his claim that Hinterland

¹ Smillie, "Conclusion," 188; Beyond the Social Gospel, 25-27.

² Smillie, "An Update," 58.

³ Smillie, "The Social Gospel in Canada," 333-4.

⁴ Smillie, Beyond the Social Gospel, 44.

Theology is faithful to Christian orthodoxy does not clarify much.¹ One is forced to ask, which atonement theme in Christian orthodoxy is he referring to? If Smillie would take the time to delineate what images of God are behind his approach, and the images of God which the prophets proclaimed, he could further ground his political and prophetic theology. As Brueggemann states, "We are indeed made in the image of some God. And perhaps we have no more important theological investigation than to discern in whose image we have been made."² If this were done, one would be able to determine if his prophetic model of Christ is in conflict with the more traditional Christologies and a theology of the cross. It is possible for the prophetic role to have many similarities with a *theologia crucis*, as Brueggemann notes:

The cross is the ultimate metaphor for prophetic criticism because it means the end of the old consciousness that brings death on everyone. . . . Without the cross, prophetic imagination will likely be as strident and as destructive as that which it criticizes. The cross is the assurance that effective prophetic criticism is done not by an outsider, but always by one who must embrace the grief, enter into the death, and know the pain of the criticized one.³

As Luther said, "the cross tests everything."⁴ When the test of the cross is applied to Smillie's theology, however, some shortcomings are revealed. One is never given an indication of what Christ accomplishes on the cross for humanity.

¹ Smillie, *Beyond the Social Gospel*, 44.

² Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 17.

³ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴ "*probat crucis omnia.*" WA 5: 179.31 (Second Psalms Commentary, 1519-1521).

IV. CONCLUSION

In comparing Smillie's work to Luther's theology of the cross, it would be inaccurate to conclude that Smillie has an implicit theology of the cross. There are just too many differences to suggest otherwise. Yet there are sufficient similarities present that he could, if he chose to, borrow some themes in the theology of the cross to strengthen and deepen the theological aspect of his political theology. If such a process were to be undertaken, it would involve addressing various important concerns.

First, one area which Smillie might consider developing further is the significance of the Incarnation, both as a hermeneutic and its Christological importance. As a hermeneutic, it reveals a radical inversion in one's perceptions or images of God, images which are often used to support a particular view of society. The Incarnation, furthermore, is in harmony with the prophetic theme which he relies on. At this point, Brueggemann provides some important perspectives on the relationship between the theology of the cross and a prophetic ministry.

One area which Smillie overlooks, however, is that, while the prophetic ministry calls for a recognition of who has "access to and control of life-goods,"¹ it is not limited to this. The prophets also challenge the images of God held by society. Behind the prophets' calls for justice in this world are calls to see God in a new light. Furthermore, injustices are not only sins against one's neighbours--they are, on a deeper level, sins against the Word of God. It is nothing less than idolatry. By being "curved in on oneself" as individuals and as a society, we not only rob our neighbours, but we rob from and corrupt the chosen image of God's self-revelation.²

¹ Brueggemann, "Voices of the Night," 8-9.

² For example, see LW 18: 212-14; WA 13: 302-4 (Micah Commentary, 1525).

When the implications of the Incarnation and the cross are overlooked, it is very easy for a theology to become smug and speculative. A "ladder theology," as Gerhard Forde calls it, can very easily develop.¹ Revelation is not needed, because God's nature and will is obvious to all. In this kind of theology, there is no need for Luther's concept of the hidden/revealed God. The only inversions that are needed are in the class structures of society. Inversions of images of God are either non-essential or inconsequential.

By not having this hidden/revealed image of God, Smillie is able to focus primarily on the revealed and transcendent God implicit in the prophetic tradition. This God will judge and bring about an inversion in society. Overlooked, however, are the themes of the immanent, hidden God, and of an "other" world. Yet both images of God and both images of society--this world and the "eternal life" world--are addressed by the prophets. As a consequence, salvation has a double meaning: deliverance from present injustices, and freedom in eternal life.² Otherwise, Christ as Saviour means nothing more than Christ the social reformer.

For God to be hidden in Christ in this world means that not everything about God is revealed in the Incarnation. There are aspects of God that are revealed beyond the confines of a "this world" perspective. The revelation of "God-with-us" in this world, concerned about this world and social injustice, is not all that there is to know about God. It only reveals what God has chosen to be revealed.

Second, a move toward a theology of the cross by Smillie could be facilitated by exploring the similarities between Luther and Marx regarding inversion. The article by Rotstein

¹ Gerhard O. Forde, Where God Meets Man: Luther's Down to Earth Approach to the Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972).

² Luther notes both aspects in his commentaries on the minor prophets. For example, see LW 18: 127-8; WA 13: 159.1-160.2 (Amos commentary, 1524-1525).

provides an excellent and stimulating discussion of the possibilities in developing the inversion motif of the theology of the cross in a deliberate way.

Third, while there is a certain advantage in tracing the similarities between Luther and Marx over inversion, there are also certain difficulties which must be dealt with. For example, Smillie's insistence on doing a class analysis raises some theological questions. While the debate over the role of Marxian interpretations in Christianity is far from settled, it must be questioned if *only* a class analysis of society can make a political theology effective.¹ If that is the case, is God's grace channelled only through those who take this approach to social analysis? Does a class analysis become a "necessary work" which the church or society must do before grace is bestowed? If so, then Luther's original attack on the church for resorting to philosophy to interpret theology can be reframed today as a question about whether class analysis has replaced philosophy in that formula. Is not the resulting theology, at least in Luther's view, a theology of glory?

On the other hand, perhaps Smillie is pointing to a new reality, a reality unknown at the time of the prophets and even Luther. With the advent of an industrialized society, perhaps the earlier religious analysis which distinguished rich from poor has become inadequate. Even if this is the case, however, one must wonder if only a class analysis can reveal these distinctions. Is it Christology, or a class analysis which governs his theological inquiry?

Fourth, Smillie does not address the issue of what it means to be human in his discussion of the need to deal with reality. He does a masterful job describing the realities of society, but

¹ Petulla, for one, does not think so. He writes, "Political theology assumes that no single model of reality or mode of analysis provides a total explanation of social praxis." Joseph Petulla, Christian Political Theology: A Marxian Guide (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1972), 29. Hordern also makes reference to this in "Political Theology," 54.

the reality of being human within this society is not discussed. What, for example, is his image of what life will be like once inversion has occurred? Or will this inversion never completely occur, so that the reality is that humans will always be in the midst of the struggle for this inversion? If that is the case, then there is a strong point of similarity with Luther. Otherwise, the question remains: is this struggle for inversion an integral part of human life, or will human life on this earth only be fully realized once the inversion has been completed? If the latter is the case, then can full humanity ever be realized? This raises questions about the role eschatology plays in his prophetic approach.

Fifth, Smillie does provide a strong critique of a theology of glory, even though he does not use that term. Here there are many obvious parallels with Luther and other theologians of the cross. There is a difference, though, even here. Smillie contrasts a theology of glory to his remnant, or prophetic theology, whereas Luther contrasts it to a theology of the cross. While there are many similarities between these prophetic and remnant themes and a theology of the cross, they are not in all respects identical. A greater focus on the Incarnation and on the Christological aspects of a theology of the cross would allow Smillie to provide a deeper foundation for his work, and it would also provide one possible way to portray his political theology as something that is not an option, but rather a central part of Christian life.

In conclusion, while there are many similarities in Smillie's work with Luther's theology of the cross, it cannot be considered a theology of the cross on its own. Certain themes in Luther's theology of the cross could provide a greater theological emphasis or foundation for his work. Yet, it should also be recognized that Smillie takes some of the themes inherent in the theology of the cross and applies them in ways which Luther never considered. For example, while Luther's theology of the cross provided a hermeneutic for doing social and even economic

analyses, he himself did not develop it in this area with any consistency. Smillie has gone far beyond Luther in this regard. For that he is to be commended. It may even be that, precisely because he spends less time elaborating on the theological implications of some of the major themes in a theology of the cross, he is able to explore in much greater detail—and with much greater freedom—the way these themes impact on our social and economic life.

One final question must be posed. Even if Smillie were to develop the Christology or the theological content in his political theology further, would he want to use the theology of the cross as a basis for this endeavour? The answer to this question may reveal his verdict as to whether the theology of the cross can be seen as a useful hermeneutical tool and theological perspective for the Canadian context, as he has defined it. On the other hand, it may reveal that he considers such an implicitly "theological" approach as something which has contributed to the problem by offering further support of the status quo in society and by disguising the need for class analysis. If that is the case, perhaps he has not seen the possibilities inherent in the radical character of the God portrayed in Luther's theology of the cross.

CHAPTER SIX

CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY AND THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

I. INTRODUCTION

The first two contemporary theologies studied have had as their focus economic concerns. Chapter Four concentrated on a political theology which sought to address economic issues from a Roman Catholic perspective, while Chapter Five dealt with a political theology that approached the same economic issues from a Marxian and prophetic tradition. However, these approaches do not exhaust the possible variations among political theologies in today's world which seek to be relevant or meaningful--not only to Christians, but to society as a whole. Another possible approach is called contextual theology. As will be seen, a contextual theology attempts to understand and speak to the cultural context in which people find themselves. Rather than focusing on a specific issue in society such as economic injustice, contextual theology seeks to explore and reveal the cultural "ethos" that supports or creates the injustices and anxieties of a society or culture. In the attempt to explore the limits and the strengths of the theology of the cross for contemporary theology, therefore, it is important that a comparison be done between the *theologia crucis* and a specifically contextual theology. For purposes of this study, the contextual theology of Douglas John Hall will be examined. The primary reason for focusing on his work is the fact that he consciously seeks to incorporate Luther's theology of the cross into his programme of contextuality. In fact, of the four contemporary theologies studied in this work, this is the only one which attempts to be an explicit theology of the cross.

The Canadian theologian Douglas John Hall, Professor of Christian Theology at McGill University in Montreal, has consistently emphasized the need for a North American contextual theology. For too long, he argues, the theology bandied about on this continent has been "borrowed" from Europe, or even Latin America. These theological "programmes," however, do not take into account the *Sitz-im-Leben* of contemporary North American society; hence Hall has proposed the development of a uniquely North American contextual theology.

Ironically, however, the methodological framework which Hall adopts for his contextuality is derived from a late medieval European, Martin Luther. Hall's reason for this is simple. Not only does Luther's theology of the cross provide an excellent basis for his contextual theology, it serves to quell the fears of those who would assume that contextuality in theology means discarding all tradition. Contextuality, he contends, is not to be confused with relativism or "situationalism": unlike them, it includes the quest for a "useable past," a past which keeps it from losing its specific *Christian* identity.¹

While Hall recognizes the need for reflection upon the Christian tradition, this does not mean that he is willing to settle for the prevalent, majority tradition as the basis for his North American contextual theology. Instead, he opts for what he calls a "thin" and often neglected tradition, Luther's theology of the cross. It is, he contends, the type of contextual theology that can best address the present context.

In this chapter, the methodology of Hall's theology of the cross will be explored first, since Hall emphasizes this more than its Christological content. Next, the Christology of his theology of the cross will be explored. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of how Hall

¹ Douglas John Hall, "On Contextuality in Christian Theology," Toronto Journal of Theology 1 no. 1 (Spring 1985) 12-13.

goes beyond Luther in applying the theology of the cross to specific contexts, and by discussing whether other themes found in Luther's *theologia crucis* might strengthen and augment Hall's programme of contextuality.

II. THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS AS A METHODOLOGY

Hall correctly recognizes that the theology of the cross involves more than a Christology. While it does have something to say about the event on the cross, it encompasses much more than that: it is also a way of doing theology in a specific cultural context. This methodological aspect is often overlooked, however. As Hall states,

Contrary to the way in which the term is frequently heard in the English-speaking world, the "theology of the cross" is not a synonym for the doctrine of atonement. It designates rather a whole theological and faith posture.¹

As a "whole theological and faith structure," the theology of the cross is opposed to a theology of glory. It is not one of many "theologies of..." which have permeated the North American ecclesiastical scene.² Nor is it a privatistic theology, focused on personal trials and accompanied

¹ Hall, *Thinking the Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989), 24. Elsewhere he states, "It is therefore necessary to clarify at once that 'the theology of the cross' is a way of speaking about the entire enterprise of Christian theology. . . . For [Luther], it is not a special theological theme or an emphasis adopted for polemical purposes. Nor does it connote merely a particular doctrine—the doctrine of the cross or the doctrine of atonement. Obviously it is polemical. From the first it was defined in opposition to another theological approach, the *theologia gloriae*. Obviously also it does have something to do with the cross and the atoning work of Christ. As Aulén and others have pointed out, Luther created a turning point in the history of the doctrine of atonement because of his special theological approach. But its being polemical and integrally related to the theology of atonement should not obscure the fact that it is far more inclusive than these applications. The truth is, *theologia crucis* in Luther refers to a spirit and a method, a way of conceiving of *the whole* content of the faith and the task of theology." Idem, *Lighten our Darkness* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 118.

² Hall, *Thinking the Faith*, 25.

by a fatalism about life in general while looking forward only to an "otherworld reality."¹

Rather than rejecting this world, a theology of the cross is to be explicitly contextual:

A theology which looks to God's solidarity with the broken creation and aims to participate in God's healing of that creation *must* involve itself in the specifics of its society's problematique, including its economics, its foreign policies, its long- and short-range goals.²

The very methodology of a theology of the cross, then, forces it to be a contextual theology. It must become political if it is to have anything to say to North American society. It must also take into account the two "paradoxical" factors or elements which are essential for any contextual theology: *continuity* and *discontinuity*.³ A theology must have continuity—both in terms of the tradition, and of God "with-us" rather than utterly transcendent and distant. This continuity must reveal that God takes the human context seriously.⁴ On the other hand, a contextual theology must also identify and recognize the discontinuities which are present. These discontinuities are clearly reflected, according to Hall, in the scandal of the cross.⁵ This scandal, however, must be distinguished from the many false "scandals" which ignore or minimize the

¹ Hall, Thinking the Faith, 30-31.

² *Ibid.*, 39.

³ This "paradox" or methodological tension reflects Jürgen Moltmann's description of the tension between "relevance" and "identity," as delineated in The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology, R. A. Wilson and John Bowden, trans. (London: SCM Press, and New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 7-31. There must be a sense of relevance—of "presence" within our context so that it is recognizable; but there must also be something unique in the Christian message and about the Christian message that allows for a hope that things will not always be the same. The relevance of the Christian proclamation makes it identifiable *within* and in *continuity* with society, while its specific Christian identity challenges society with an alternative that is in *discontinuity* with that society.

⁴ Hall, Thinking the Faith, 329ff.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 335.

discontinuity contained in the gospel proclamation.¹ It is the cross which creates the true scandal. It sounds a discordant note about human perceptions of God—a message that is different than what one would expect in descriptions of God’s nature and activities. On the other hand, for the scandal to be heard and even recognized in our context, there must be elements of continuity within it. The discontinuous message must be proclaimed within a specific historical and understandable context:

The tension in question may then be stated as follows: while the core of the Christian message (kerygma) is *discontinuous* with human experience, the message is nevertheless obviously intended for human beings and must therefore in some way be, or become *continuous* with their experience.²

With his emphasis on the methodological aspect of the theology of the cross, therefore, Hall focuses on the Incarnation, cross and solidarity, and on the need to deal honestly with reality. Both aspects contain within them the required tension between continuity and discontinuity. God becomes incarnate, entering into solidarity with humanity (continuity); yet the cross introduces the opposing, simultaneous discontinuity in the theological method. One must enter into a dialogue with one’s culture or society in order to hear its story (continuity), yet not overlook the need for inversions (discontinuity), so that this society might become more fully human and responsible to God and to each other rather than seeking only personal interests. In some respects, this methodological approach or awareness is a reflection of Luther’s perspective

¹ For example, he is critical of an apologetic theology which would try to minimize this discontinuity while supporting society as it is. This approach attempts to bypass the real gap between God and humanity (Thinking the Faith, 339-41). However, on the other hand he criticizes kerygmatic theology for proclaiming the discontinuity while minimizing the continuity, and which fears being too accessible to the world (*Ibid.*, 336-7, 341). In both cases, the tension between continuity and discontinuity is minimized.

² Hall, Thinking the Faith, 327.

of the human being as *simul iustus et peccator*. Both aspects are needed for a proper and healthy tension.

In outlining his methodological approach derived from the theology of the cross, Hall therefore focuses on the Incarnation, cross, and solidarity, and the need to deal honestly with the reality of society as it is. These themes will be discussed in the following section, as will some of his attempts at applying this methodological approach to church and society.

A. Incarnation, Cross and Solidarity

Like Luther, Hall makes a connection between the Incarnation and the theology of the cross: "The theology of incarnation is and remains a theology of the cross, for it proclaims a God whose will it is to be with us, where we are (Emmanuel)."¹ In other words, the Incarnation is central to a theology of the cross because it reveals "God's abiding commitment to the world."² This abiding commitment, however, cannot take place in the abstract or on a theoretical level. It must be specific, and occur within a specific context; by its very nature it must be contextual.³ Otherwise, the Incarnate God is no more than a docetic Christ. The Incarnation, however, rejects this docetic theology of glory because it denies the real humanity of Jesus. As Hall declares, "Not 'perfect' humanity (whatever that would mean), but real humanity, is what

¹ Hall, *Lighten our Darkness*, 121. The whole intention of a contextual theology is to "bear witness to the incarnation. The theology of the cross is first of all a way of speaking about the character of God's entry into the sphere of human history." (Ibid., 149).

² Hall, *Thinking the Faith*, 25.

³ "Christian theology is contextual by definition." Hall, *Thinking the Faith*, 69. He further suggests that the problem with North American church and society is that it has accepted a theology that is not only noncontextual, but actually "anticontextual." (Ibid.).

is required of our Christology."¹ While a theology of glory attempts to portray Christ as human in very general terms, such a portrayal is woefully inadequate for humanity because the human context is ignored:

. . . to come through to us as *vere Homo*, he must be capable of being perceived as one who participates in *our* humanity, not merely humanity in general. There is no humanity in general; there is only the humanity that we know.²

The Incarnation, therefore, reminds theologians that "theological activity must involve a quite *conscious and deliberate* engagement of the context."³ Hall explains:

Many Christian theologians have made passionate protestations concerning God's identification with the creature, yet they have missed the point of this incarnational thrust of the whole biblical picture of God *as it ought to inform our theological method*. The reason is that they turn the "us" of the Emmanuel formula into an abstraction: humanity, creation, the world, the universe. . . . The Emmanuel formula, however, together with the Hebraic theological-historical consciousness that lies behind it, wants to insist that what is implied here is precisely *not* a generalization but a radical particularization of God's gracious *Mitsein* (being with). . . . Turning the "us" of the Emmanuel-formula into an abstraction is like identifying the neighbor of Jesus' love-commandment along such universal lines that (very conveniently) it no longer applies concretely to any human being whom we may happen to live with or to meet, especially not those *conspicuously* particular human beings who are in need, or are perceived by us as enemy.⁴

Hall correctly identifies the fact that the Incarnation is a story of God completely entering our history--even to the extent that this might lead to failure: "For to become flesh, to become one of us, means not only to be born but also to die, to fail."⁵

¹ Hall, "Rethinking Christ," Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity, Alan T. Davies, ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 180.

² Hall, Rethinking Christ: Theological Reflections on Shusaku Endo's *Silence*, " Interpretation 33 (1979), 266.

³ Hall, Thinking the Faith, 78.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

The theology of the cross also takes the cross seriously. Yet this is not the case, in the majority of instances, in the North American context. The Resurrected One, rather than the Crucified Christ, is the focus of attention. What is required, therefore, is for the North American society to be confronted with the Crucified Christ, such as portrayed by Grünewald and Rouault.¹ Hall elaborates:

The test of theological authenticity is whether we can present Jesus *as the crucified*. To be concrete: Can one perceive in the Jesus of this theology a man who knows the meaning of meaninglessness, the experience of negation, the anguish of hopelessness? Does he encounter the absurd, and with trembling? Would a man dare to confess to this Jesus his deepest anxieties, his most ultimate questions? . . . Would such a Christ understand failure? Could he participate in *our* failure? Or is he eternally above all that? Do we have to do with him now only as the risen and glorious One, who has put all that behind him? . . . In sum, the test of authenticity in theology today is: Is this "Jesus Christ and him crucified"?²

On the other hand, Hall argues that a theology of glory focuses on the Christ of the Easter triumph, or a kerygmatic Christ, while avoiding the Christ on the cross. This triumphant

¹ Hall, Thinking the Faith, 140-41.

² Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 211-12. Hall further suggests that one of the reasons that the movie Jesus Christ Superstar was so unpopular among some groups of Christians was that it did not contain a resurrection scene. As Hall comments, "The orthodox complain that this piece has no 'resurrection.' Precisely! They want to have everything answered--made right again. He must after all be presented as a success--a *real* Superstar! The triumphant 'Yes' must in the last analysis cancel out the hideous 'No.' . . . And thus is Jesus Christ removed altogether from *the place where we live*. The religious have their little triumph of orthodoxy, but it has nothing to do with life anymore." *Ibid.*, 212. In this sense, the movie has obvious parallels with the ending found in the gospel of Mark.

Luther does not deny the "Christ of the Easter triumph" as easily as does Hall. However, Luther insists that this resurrected Christ can only be understood in light of the crucified Christ. As he states in the Heidelberg Disputation, thesis 20, "it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, *unless* he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross." [italics added for emphasis] LW 31:52-3; WA 1: 362.11-12 (Heidelberg Disputation, 1518). Luther follows this principle in discussing cross and resurrection: "[Christ] will be glorious, but after his death." LW 17: 215; WA 31/II: 428.16-17 (1527-1530 Isaiah Commentary). The "Yes" of the resurrection for Luther cannot come about by denying the presence of the cross. One cannot avoid the cross and focus only on the resurrection.

Christ functions as a "sanctuary from the world."¹ This image of Christ which the theology of glory emphasizes strongly contrasts with the scandalous, "weak" image of Christ on the cross. As Hall states, "the religion of Empire (*whatever* empire!) could not and still cannot stand having at its centre a poor, suffering human being as its primary symbol and metaphor for Deity."²

A theologian of the cross also understands the Incarnation as a commitment by God to be in solidarity with humanity in this world.³ But this solidarity must be understood within its proper context. It involves more than a theological or spiritual solidarity. There must also be solidarity with people in terms of the political, social, and economic context; in other words, it involves God's solidarity with people in the context of all aspects of life. Unfortunately, the church has not always wanted to enter into such a solidarity with a Christ who hangs on the cross or with anything that has to do with this world. Its focus on an "otherworldly" paradise was used to justify its ignoring of this world. As Hall notes,

Proclaiming God's immeasurable love for the world and God's passionate concern for its healing, the church has more often than not acted as if the only solution to life were to abandon the world as soon and as wholeheartedly as possible. . . . for a variety of reasons—Christianity has *rather characteristically* fostered a world-denying, "religious" orientation to life. In any case, it has by no means commended itself to the world as unambiguously world affirming. The incarnation itself—perhaps already with *some* Newer Testament backing—has been taken, not as the supreme act of the divine *commitment* to creation and the means through which the faithful are *incorporated into* that commitment, but as the way

¹ Hall, "Theological Reflections on Shusaku Endo's *Silence*," 267.

² Hall, "Luther's Theology of the Cross," *Consensus* 15 no. 2 (1989), 12.

³ Hall, *Lighten our Darkness*, 149, 110-11; *Thinking the Faith*, 25-8, 421. Elsewhere, Hall argues that "It is the movement of solidarity and identification, of full participation in the life of the world, that is fundamentally intended in the dogma of the incarnation, whatever the language may be." Idem., *God and Human Suffering: An Exercise in the Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 108.

out: Jesus providing his disciple community with the mode of escape from an impossible and doomed situation.¹

The challenge and, in fact, the call to enter into solidarity with the world that God has created means entering into solidarity with both a Christ who suffered on the cross and with the broken world, a world where people suffer and are constantly challenged to admit their brokenness rather than pretending it does not exist. "To be a Christian in the Biblical sense," contends Hall, "is to be taken out of the spiritless, problemless world of the bourgeois and thrust into the dark night of suffering under and with the Christ."² Following the example of Kierkegaard, he suggests that Christianity seeks to enter into solidarity with humanity and is willing to look to the Christ crucified, whereas Christendom seeks to avoid the cross while escaping from this world.³

This stress on solidarity with those who suffer or have rejected a Christendom which seeks to act as the "official religion for an officially optimistic society"⁴ is a common theme in Hall's writings. Only when the church is willing to enter into solidarity with the suffering--to become incarnate with the people whom Jesus became incarnate among--can it discover its true identity: "Only as [the Church] is itself denied the glory that it craves can it become the friend of those who can no longer pretend to glory."⁵

¹ Hall, Thinking the Faith, 217-18. A more careful study of the gospels, however, reveals that they are indeed affirming of "this world," despite later misinterpretations. See for example, the affirmation of "this world" in John 3:16!

² Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 132.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 73ff.

⁵ Ibid., 220.

Hall emphasizes the need for the "disciple community" to enter into a "working" solidarity with those most vulnerable, so that they may be turned towards life rather than death.¹

This involves becoming a community of beggars: "Real solidarity with those who suffer recognizes that their condition is our own: we are all beggars together."² While this lived solidarity amongst other "beggars" provides no guarantees, it does provide the venue in which one can truly think and confess the faith:

For what is required of a truly confessional theology is not only that it should participate in the struggles of its context, but that it should do so without the comfort of ready-made resolutions of those struggles in the form of accumulated dogmas formulas, creeds, catechisms and systems of doctrine. . . . Unless the disciple community *itself* exposes itself to that which is endangering the life of its world, it will be incapable of confessing the faith. It will be imprisoned in the professional mode.³

This emphasis on solidarity with those who suffer, however, does have some limitations imposed upon it by Hall. While he stresses the centrality of God's solidarity with a humanity whose primary "mark" is suffering, suffering is not to be glorified: "To *seek* suffering, whether for oneself or for others, is not the counsel of this theology."⁴ A theology of the cross repudiates a theology of glory,

not because it is fundamentally masochistic and mistrusts or despises man's search for happiness, but because it insists that authentic happiness can only be found as we confront and enter into that which under the conditions of existence negates and dispels happiness."⁵

¹ Hall, Thinking the Faith, 32.

² Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 152.

³ Hall, Thinking the Faith, 109.

⁴ Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 219. See also, Idem., God and Human Suffering, 127ff, 144ff.

⁵ Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 149. See also 203.

A theology of the cross is not, therefore, merely a way of negation (*via negativa*). It also offers hope. But this hope can only be found when one acknowledges the true humanity of Christ and the actual human context. Hall writes:

. . .the theology of the cross takes as its point of departure the brokenness of the human spirit and the human community. It places its hope in God's transformative solidarity with fallen creation, with the world *in* its brokenness. It wants to serve, not as a ready-made panacea for every form of human and worldly suffering, but as the salvific base from which the courage may be found willingly to participate in the suffering of the earth and its creatures.¹

While both Hall and Luther emphasize the Incarnation, the reality of the cross, and the need for solidarity, there are, nevertheless some basic methodological differences. For example, Hall argues that "The cross belongs first to us—to mankind, to every man. It becomes the cross of Jesus the Christ because only so can he identify with us and so break the power of what destroys us."² Luther, however, suggested that only by God first choosing to be revealed on the cross is one able to consequently recognize the cross as one's own. Hall begins with anthropology, while Luther starts with Christology.

B. Dealing Honestly with Reality

The theology of the cross requires people to take a realistic and critical approach towards life, rather than blindly accepting the status quo. It insists that the "roses be taken off the cross"³ and the rose coloured glasses from one's eyes. As Hall writes,

¹ Hall, Thinking the Faith, 28.

² Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 121.

³ This phrase is used by both Moltmann (The Crucified God, 35) and Forde, "The Work of Christ," Christian Dogmatics, 2 Vols. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, eds. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), vol. 2: 5-99; pp. 28, 30, 35, 41, 52, 60 *et passim*. Forde's use of the term suggests that a theology of glory, is at base, one which covers the cross with roses.

The theology of the cross does not *celebrate* the world's status quo, and it certainly eschews the brand of "realism" which is simply fatalism in disguise; but it is marked by a determination to be entirely honest about the evil and negation that is "there" in existence, and to work out its strategies of hope only in dialogue with the suffering that is consequent upon that evil and negation."¹

This honest realism is precisely what is needed in the North American context which cannot admit failure.² Rather than face the "darkness," our society scurries frantically about, trying to find some little candles to dispel the darkness. The problem is, the light that is offered is "mostly artificial, for we have not yet exposed ourselves to the darkness."³ This avoidance of the darkness is understandable. Yet only when a person is willing to deal honestly with reality and to enter into the darkness, is there the possibility of true freedom:

Surely the point of the theology of the cross is that a man does not have to falsify what he finds in life by way of darkness and failure. He does not have to become an optimist in order to hope. He does not have to gloss over death in order to hear the possibility of life. He does not have to repress his whole life's experience in order to expect a conclusion—a verdict, so to speak—other than the ones to which his life's experience seems logically to point.⁴

Since a theology of the cross is willing to face up to reality, however, it is able to be a truly contextual theology.⁵ Yet people do not like having to face up to the reality of their context, and so they cover it with a false optimism. North America has generally tried to be an "officially

¹ Hall, Thinking the Faith, 29.

² "The most fundamental reason why North Americans hold on to expectations whose foundation in experience has almost disappeared is that we cannot admit failure." Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 198.

³ Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 222. Hall continues, "We are using our alleged light to ward off the darkness, not to have the possibility of taking a few steps *within* it." (Ibid.).

⁴ Ibid., 142-3.

⁵ As Hall notes, this willingness to face the darkness provides the "inescapable convergence between the *theologia crucis* tradition and theological contextuality." Hall, Thinking the Faith, 29.

optimistic society," and has turned to the church to sanction this perspective on life. As a result, progress and success are sought, even if reality must be denied in the process. But it is becoming more and more difficult to deny this reality. The illusion of the increasing success of Western society's conquest of human problems and struggles is being revealed as precisely that--an illusion.

Reality must be faced. It cannot be avoided. This would seem obvious. But such is not always the case, suggests Hall. To a people always scurrying to get into the light--any light!--even if this light is artificial, it is difficult and perhaps even impossible to discern reality.¹ Hall acknowledges this problem with discerning our context, which leads him to ask, "How, as Christians, can we assess the contemporary North American milieu, the situation in which we are called to do theology, the culture in whose midst we are to be a disciple community of the Christ?"² What are needed are some guides to lead us into the darkness or reality of life, so that we might deal with this reality of life rather than avoiding it. This darkness does not necessarily lead only to negation.³ Nor does it mean that we focus only on the darkness. While Hall suggests that only the light is final, society still must think about the darkness and enter into it because it is already the human condition.⁴ Moreover, Christ is "the One who meets us in our darkness and death."⁵ But who are the guides who can lead us into the darkness so that reality might be faced?

¹ Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 222.

² Hall, Thinking the Faith, 145.

³ Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 150.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 149.

Hall gives four guidelines to assist society in entering into the darkness and to honestly define reality. Society must first listen to the testimony of its victims. This testimony, he suggests, is "the most objective of all the criteria available to us."¹ The testimony of victims challenges society to recognize them, and then respond. The victims confront society with the fact that success is more of a myth than we would like. Their testimony also confronts society with some difficult questions about an infrastructure which requires victims so that others can be successful.² The victims of society must be listened to if the gospel is not to be scorned:

. . . it is simply a betrayal of the whole tradition when Christians permit themselves to point to the "pathos of God" incarnated in the crucified one and then fail to give priority, in their *theological* reflection and analysis as in their general conduct of their witness in the world, to those in their own world who are being crucified by the economic systems, political structures, and dominant cultural mores with which, on the whole, the churches of the First World are clearly identified.³

The second testimony that society must listen to is that of the "sensitive." These are the people who have the gift of speaking for the world, and includes artist, poets, novelists, dramatists, and musicians,⁴ both Christian and non-Christian. Hall makes extensive use of this testimony in his writings.⁵

¹ Hall, Thinking the Faith, 134.

² Hall asks, "Do the particular pursuits of your society create and even *need* victims--certain *types* of victims? Does your economic system *depend upon* the victimization of some? How do you deal with your poor, your unemployed, your marginalized groupings, your prisoners, your young, your aged, your ill and dying, the fragile persons in your midst who are most affected by your corporate instability? And what of those beyond your own borders? Do other peoples pay the price of your security, your prosperity?" *Ibid.*, 135.

³ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 136-8.

⁵ For example, see *Ibid.*, 31-35 for a small sampling of some of the authors and poets to whom he turns.

A third testimony that assists society in discerning reality is the sources of the Christian tradition. Both scripture and the Christian tradition contain within them the reminder that "the world should not be the way it is."¹

The fourth testimony that needs to be heard comes from "the body," as Hall calls it.² This is the disciple community that is in dialogue with the world, and theology must listen to these voices. Hall suggests, for example, that the Protestant concept of "the priesthood of all believers" must be developed more than it has in the past, so that the voices of the "theological experts" are not the only voices that are heeded.³

While the testimony of these four voices must be heard, dealing with reality also involves discerning what these voices say about the reality of what it means to be human, and what it means to be human within society. Society, argues Hall, has defined humanity by the term "master." But this is precisely what young people, for example, are rebelling against.⁴ This image of humanity as "master" has been supported by Christianity: "The establishment of Christianity in the New World is grounded first of all in the identification of the Christian view of man with the modern image of man as technological master of his environment."⁵ This "Christian" view of humanity does have some scriptural basis; but it must be tempered with a healthy relationship with nature, each other, and God. Dominion, Hall argues, "has nothing to

¹ Hall, Thinking the Faith, 139.

² Ibid., 140.

³ Ibid., 140-41.

⁴ Hall notes that this rebellion on the part of youth is "a revolt *against* the most dominant answer to that question given in the modern epoch: that man is master." Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 158.

⁵ Ibid., 79.

do with the arbitrary exercise of power."¹ Rather, it involves love, responsibility, and stewardship.²

There are many difficulties with this "master" image of humanity. For one thing, it often leads to the connotation of man (specifically) as warrior.³ This imagery is prevalent even within Christendom. Many of the favourite "old-time" hymns make use of this warrior imagery: the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" is only one of the more obvious examples.⁴ The warrior, however, is also a destroyer, and destruction involves death. Hall comments:

So the image of man as master has the smell of death upon it. It cannot dissociate itself from the aberrations it has spawned: the "master race"; the spectacle of American soldiers, innocents raised on homespun truths and mottoes in which the concept of mastery was subtly inculcated, slaughtering helpless women and children at My Lai. War, death, and the repression of spontaneity and life are what mastery has come to mean. For it *must* mean, at last, the mastery also of *human* nature.⁵

A second problem with the image of the human as master is that it encourages a "technocratic" attitude towards human life and society.⁶ People are objects to be used. Usefulness is defined by how "marketable" something or someone is, and how much value something or someone is at present or will be in the future. In Christendom, this has led to what is, in effect, a

¹ Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 83. Hall elaborates on this theme in Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship Commission on Stewardship, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., and New York: Friendship Press, 1986), 68-87.

² Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 83-4.

³ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁴ Hall comments on liturgy and hymns which have as their theme the image of Christ as Victor and warrior in God and Human Suffering, 106.

⁵ Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 163.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

"prescription" Christianity: the purpose of Christianity is to solve a problem or to cure human faults.¹ The "problem" of sin, for example is cured with a prescription of grace. The problem of the cross is overcome with the solution of the resurrection. The darkness that is sin, cross, and lack of personal and social progress, and which cannot easily be "cured," is either studiously ignored or actively suppressed. The reality is, however, that even after the victory of the third day, the human situation is still one of the cross.² This final victory over sin, evil and death has not come about, even if it is proclaimed as such. Yet a theology of glory continues to insist on portraying the human being as the master over everything, who can "fix" all problems.³

This image of humanity is based on the image of Christ as a "victor" who utilizes power to succeed.⁴ While a theology of the cross calls humanity to face up to this sham of "conquest already achieved," a theology of glory would attempt to ignore both the problems and the victims, or at least view them as "problems" almost solved. Yet in doing so, it fails to take seriously the evil that is present in life.⁵ What happens in the process is that the cross is reduced to a cute symbol rather than that which points to the clash between life and death.⁶

¹ Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 105.

² Hall, "Rethinking Christ," 183. However, the *simul iustus et peccator* of Luther suggests that as saints we are resurrected, and can celebrate that, even though we are also sinners confronted with the cross.

³ Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 157-82.

⁴ Hall, God and Human Suffering, 99ff.

⁵ Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 205.

⁶ A good illustration of this "cuteness" is Hall's reference to Margaret Laurence's description of a stained glass window in a Protestant church in which the Jesus on the cross looked like "a slightly effeminate travelling salesman . . . expiring with absolutely no inconvenience on what might in other circumstances have been a cross." Margaret Laurence, The Diviners, New Canadian Library 3 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971), 41; as quoted in Hall, The Canada (continued...)

Hall's portrayal of the human as one who seeks mastery is very similar to Luther's description, in theological terms, of what it means to be human. For Luther, the problem was that humans were always trying to be gods. For Hall, humans are trying to be masters who have arbitrary power over both other humans beings and nature. The reality of the situation, however, is that the notion of mastery is a cherished myth. Hall describes it in these terms:

. . . the concept of mastery contained an enormous lie from the outset. We simply are not masters. We are neither wise enough nor good enough to be masters. We are able to understand this better now--the lie is becoming more obvious to more of us. Just at the point where human mastery becomes a real possibility the world shows terrible evidence of our lack of wisdom and our lack of goodness.¹

Here we are confronted with the implications of this desire for mastery for society. Not only does the imagery of the individual as master reek of death for the individual, it also spells out the death sentence for society as well. Furthermore, Hall astutely notes that "the idea of mastery is no basis for community"² or the "nuclear" family.³

Hall contends that the problems arising from society's attempt to be masters over everything is especially apparent in its relationship to nature. Society has, through technology,

⁶(...continued)

Crisis (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1980) 118. See also Idem., Thinking the Faith, 35, n. 31.

¹ Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 164. This view of mastery has no room for servanthood, and is therefore not cognizant of Luther's understanding that we are both masters and servants to all. LW 31:344; WA 7: 49.22-25 (Freedom of a Christian, 1520).

² Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 180. He goes on to state, "Mastery defies distribution. It moves towards mastery over others, of each over his neighbour. It lends itself to schemes of the powerful to lord it over the powerless, the rich to acquire even more riches at the expense of the poor. It assumes that those who best achieve domination have best achieved their human destiny. It is fundamentally individualistic, in the worst sense of that word." (Ibid.).

³ Ibid., 181.

tried to "conquer nature."¹ Such a venture, however, is not working. It has not been successful. All it has done is to reveal the failure of this image of society,² a failure which has reached a state of crisis: "*Unless* man turns from mastering to serving, from grasping to receiving, from independence to interdependence, he will simply not last very long on the face of the earth."³

What is needed, then, are prophets who insist that society remove its blinders and give up the image of master for one of stewards and servants. What must be proclaimed is a "theology of limits," which reminds people that they are humans, not gods.⁴ It is a "theology of beggars," people who have come to realize that they are incapable of independence, and must form communities and relationships with one another and with nature.⁵ A theology of the cross challenges people to enter into the darkness of a world where prescription solutions based on technology do not provide simple solutions. The solutions offered through such a process have avoided the darkness and the very realities of life, the very truth about our "condition."⁶ Because Hall sees in the theology of the cross the infrastructure and methodology which allows it to do precisely this, he makes it the cornerstone of his own theological approach.

¹ Hall, Imaging God, 161ff. See also Thinking the Faith, 219ff.

² Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 170.

³ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 213ff.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 203-205.

C. Application to Church and Society

The way that leads to the true light passes through the darkness rather than avoiding it. Christ was resurrected only after hanging on the cross. And hope for the world today can only come about once its failures are confronted, the voices of the victimized and the "prophets" of society are heard, and appropriate measures, such as solidarity with the marginalized, are taken. From this perspective, there is nothing specifically "Christian" about this process. It is thus an appropriate course of action for both secular society and churches. Social analysis is both expected and required. Hall also frequently relies on the writings of other voices of the sensitive, such as George Grant, Ernest Becker, and various novelists and poets.

Hall consistently applies his theology to both the North American society and the churches.¹ They are addressed together, for the church exists within the context of society. Hall is consistently critical of the church which has sought to uphold Christendom rather than follow the way of the cross.² This sort of "official Christianity" is actually, he contends, "the greatest barrier to its becoming a redemptive force in such a society, a light for our darkness."³ Cultural Christendom has failed as the official cult of the empire.⁴ Hall argues that

Official Christianity not only failed seriously to question the spirit of audacity but provided religious sanction and a theological rationale for the belief in man's mastery, the limitless range of his authority, and his own potential as the crown

¹ Hall has written extensively on the church as an *ecclesia crucis*, even if this nomenclature is not always used. See here The Future of the Church: Where Are We Headed? (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1989); The Reality of the Gospel and the Unreality of the Churches (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975); and Has the Church a Future? (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980).

² Hall, The Future of the Church: Where Are We Headed?, 49ff.

³ Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 74. Such a church is unwilling to proclaim the radical message of grace. *Ibid.*, 188.

⁴ Hall, Thinking the Faith, 200ff.

and jewel of creation. From the frontier pulpit which gave man (the white man!) the right to dominate and possess nature (including those "lesser breeds without the law") to that secular theology which celebrated man's emancipation from sacred cows and holy trees, the general impact of the Christian religion on the life of this continent has been to foster and undergird the technocratic image of man.¹

Only when the "Crucifixion of Christendom" takes place, he argues, can a new, critical reformation of the church be a real possibility.²

The church also comes under fire by Hall for naively assuming that it is not responsible for the problems of the world. He writes,

It is always tempting for those who--probably against their wills--are caught up in the prophetic tradition of truth-telling to begin straightaway to locate the causes of what is wrong outside the sphere of faith and church. But the uncanny thing about biblical religion is that it refuses to permit easy divisions of the world into guilty and innocent; and even more unsettling is that it seldom identifies the innocent ones it occasionally speaks of with the community of belief as such. More often, the innocent are those being neglected or hurt by "the elect"!³

What the church must become is a church of the cross (*ecclesia crucis*);⁴ a church which does not seek to escape the context of this world for the promise of some eternal theology;⁵ a church which does not offer a false security or act as if it has all the answers.⁶ The church that Hall looks for is one that does not seek guarantees, but rather is willing to enter the darkness and grasp the God hidden there. As Hall concludes, "To know the darkness and to name it, then,

¹ Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 215.

² Hall, Thinking the Faith, 207.

³ Hall, Imaging God, 23.

⁴ Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 222. See also Imaging God, 78ff.

⁵ Hall, Thinking the Faith, 69ff.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 209.

would be the special task of the people of the cross in this society."¹ Both church and society must first enter into their self-created darkness and hear the voices of judgement and hope, the voices which speak of alternatives to the way things have been. Only if this is done is there the possibility for survival and life.

III. THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS AS A CHRISTOLOGY

In comparing Hall's description of Luther's theology of the cross with that of von Loewenich,² one is struck by the manifold differences. One may even wonder if they are describing the same thing! Much of the difference, however, is due to the fact that Hall focuses on the methodology of the theology of the cross and what it means for the doing of theology, whereas von Loewenich focuses on the content, or Christology inherent in Luther's theology of the cross. While Hall's concern is with "doing" theology, however, he does have something to say about the Christological content as well.

A. The Hidden and Revealed God

One of the cornerstones in the content of Luther's theology of the cross was the theme of the hidden and revealed God. This theme is also discussed by Hall, although he does not elaborate on it to the extent that Luther did.

¹ Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 224.

² Walther von Loewenich, Luther's Theology of the Cross, Herbert J. A. Bouman, trans. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1976).

Hall is conscious of the fact that Christian faith begins with revelation, both historically and existentially.¹ But it is not some general sort of revelation: it is a disclosure of a presence: the presence of God in the person of Jesus Christ.² Thus, it is a self-revelation of God's own being in a very historical and explicit context. However, this self-revelation is not always recognized. The cross is not the place where people generally look to discover God. Rather, humanity is always tempted to create an image of God based on what they think God must be like in the heavens. As Hall comments,

. . . it begins to appear that the very imaging of God as it is shaped within this christological crucible is very different from what is often conjured up on purely theistic grounds. If Jesus reflects the fullness of deity—if Jesus is the image of God—then it will no longer suffice to put forward the most noble and exalted of human capacities and call them *imago Dei*.³

According to Hall, therefore, the revelation of God is hidden to those who would seek to discover the nature of God through virtues, theories or dogmas based on what God is like in the heavens rather than in the Crucified One. This self-revelation of God, on the other hand, takes place through a Christ on the cross, and not a triumphant Christ. It is this specific, contextual self-revelation of God that is found at the "heart of the theology of the cross."⁴ Hall further insists that Christology should not obscure this self-revelation or take it out of context: "Christology which becomes too prominent is bound to obscure the person whose mystery it was intended to witness."⁵ When this occurs, the context is forgotten.

¹ Hall, Thinking the Faith, 403.

² *Ibid.*, 404.

³ Hall, Imaging God, 78.

⁴ Hall, Thinking the Faith, 408. Cf. 406.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 410.

While there is always the sense of the mystery and hiddenness of God, it should be remembered that the extent of this self-revelation is controlled by God. The mystery does not vanish. A revelation of God not hidden in mystery (or in Luther's terms, the "backside of God") would overwhelm and destroy humanity. Moreover, the ever present notion of God's hiddenness also prevents people from knowing God in such a way that they might manipulate God: "God eludes our grasp in the moment of encountering us."¹ On the other hand, Hall recognizes, as does Luther, that God is hidden in order to be revealed in the very ordinary events, creatures people, thoughts and discourses of life.² It is the God hidden in the ordinary and "humanness" that is often the most difficult to perceive.

Although Hall does state at one point that "*Deus absconditus* (the hidden God) becomes *Deus revelatus* (God revealed),"³ which suggests a linear progression in the knowledge of God, he generally understands the idea of the hidden and revealed God as occurring simultaneously; "God's *revealing* of self, as a revelation of *self*, is therefore also simultaneously a *concealing*."⁴

The relationship between God's self-revelation and reason is also briefly addressed by Hall. He concludes that a theology of glory portrays revelation as something that conquers and humiliates reason.⁵ A theology of the cross, on the other hand, challenges theologians to enter

¹ Hall, *Thinking the Faith*, 408. Hall adds that this prevents us from ever making God our servant. "The Emmanuel who will be 'with us' will *not* be possessed *by* us." *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*, 388.

³ *Ibid.*, 406-7. von Loewenich, in his study on the theology of the cross in Luther, suggests that Luther eventually moves from the notion of God simultaneously concealed and revealed to one in which it is a linear progression. von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, 40, 42.

⁴ Hall, *Thinking the Faith*, 408. Later on he writes, ". . . it is the *Deus revelatus* who is simultaneously *Deus absconditus*. God is awesome to us, not because God keeps God's self distant and hidden from view, but because God comes near." *Ibid.*, 437.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 402.

into a dialogue with this hidden and revealed God and to ponder the cross and what it means, so that the "logic of the cross" (Reinhold Niebuhr) will emerge.¹ In Luther's terms, Hall seems to suggest that once the cross is encountered, reason can illuminate both faith and God's self-revelation. It makes logical sense, once a *metanoia* has occurred. What a theology of the cross does not do is to assume that it knows all there is to know about God, or that it can always be certain that God will act in certain ways. A theology of the cross approaches the revelation of God given on the cross in a spirit of humility rather than triumph.

Luther and Hall ultimately differ, however, in their approaches to this concept of the hidden and revealed God. For Luther, it is important because it reveals the God who saves in the person of the Incarnate Christ. It is this suffering, crucified Christ whom Luther focuses on as central to his Christology and soteriology. On the other hand, for Hall the concept is important primarily because of its methodological implications. It prevents people from controlling God, prevents a triumphalistic attitude by Christians, and it lays the groundwork for his emphasis on the need for the church and society to enter into a darkness (a hiddenness) if it wants to live (experience the true light). The actual hiddenness of salvation offered by God in the humanity of Christ is not as important as the process it suggests.

B. The Understanding of Faith

A theology of the cross is a theology of faith, of living in trust, without a triumphant confidence or security.² Hall thus agrees with Paul Althaus, who calls the theology of the cross

¹ Hall, "The Cross and Contemporary Culture," Reinhold Niebuhr and the Issues of our Time, Richard Harries, ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986), 183-204, pp. 189ff.

² Hall, "The Cross and Contemporary Culture," 195.

a theology of *Anfechtung* (temptation).¹ It is in the very midst of this temptation that faith is found. Whatever name it takes—the theology of the cross, a theology of *Anfechtung*, or a theology of beggars—the *theologia crucis* clings to a faith which trusts God in the midst of uncertainties and struggles. The theology of the cross rejects all the false securities offered by a theology of glory. Whether it be a security offered by the promise of heaven, or the security of knowing that success is "certain" for Christians, the result of a theology of glory is always the same: faith becomes a security and a commodity. Yet Hall, following Luther, rejects this view of faith in favour of one provided by a theology of the cross:

The true Christian faith is not a life of *securitas*, lived out in the midst of a world in which the triumph of the good is assured. On the contrary, to enter upon such a life is to be denied every form of security.²

Success is not guaranteed. All that one can be certain of is that God is present in the midst of this "experience of negation."³ Thus, "from the vantage point of the Cross, faith is enabled to contemplate failure without either courting it fatalistically or being reduced to despair by its prospect."⁴ There is an alternative:

The alternative to the security of a theology that guarantees in advance a happy issue out of all our troubles is not insecurity and anxiety but—hope! The ultimate purpose of a theology of the cross is to establish the grounds of Christian hope. . . . The theology of the cross deals not in the necessary but in the *possible* triumph of the good. It cannot offer security, but it does offer freedom and the basis for hope.⁵

¹ Hall, *Lighten our Darkness*, 120. Elsewhere, he writes, ". . . faith implies an ongoing dialogue with doubt (Luther's *Anfechtungen!*) in the midst of religious community where belief seems to involve no existential struggle." Idem., "The Cross and Contemporary Culture," 195.

² Hall, *Lighten our Darkness*, 119.

³ Ibid., 120.

⁴ Hall, "The Cross and Contemporary Culture," 194.

⁵ Hall, *Lighten our Darkness*, 145.

It should be remembered, however, that while Luther and Hall agree on this point, Luther carefully distinguished between human security and the certainty of faith. The denial of all forms of security does not mean the rejection of the certainty inherent in faith.

Referring to Luther's last written words, Hall defines the theology of the cross as a "theology of beggars."¹ It is beggars who best exemplify people without security. Besides, any attempt to obtain security is to cease living the life of the creature.² On the other hand, this beggar's faith, devoid of security, is very much open to a future that has not been already decided upon by some remote actions in heaven. Furthermore, Hall suggests that this way of life implies that doctrines and dogmas do not, nor can they, contain immutable, eternal truths. That would offer a false security.

Finally, Hall insists that faith empowers people to become involved in the world. As he writes in his book, Imaging God,

Faith, then, if it is genuine and not mere sentimentalism, transports one into the heart of the world's darkness. It does not function to insulate one from what is wrong; rather, it brings with it a greater courage to confront the world's wrongness, to accept what must be accepted, and to change what can be changed.³

Faith, as a response to what God has done for and revealed to humanity, drives a person into the world. Faith cannot be protected by withdrawing from the world. To abandon this world would

¹ Reportedly, Luther's last written words were, "*Wir sind Bettler; hoc est verum*" (We are beggars, that is true." LW 54: 476; WATr 5: 318.2-3 (no. 5677, February 16, 1546). Hall appears to prefer the term "theology of beggars" to "the theology of the cross." He states: "the only real security is the security of the beggar" (Lighten our Darkness, 119). See also, Hope Against Hope: Towards an Indigenous Theology of the Cross (Geneva: World Student Christian Federation, Vol. 1, no. 3, 1971) 34-7; and Lighten our Darkness, 117f.

² Hall, Thinking the Faith, 74.

³ Hall, Imaging God, 3.

be to "abandon the cross at its Centre,"¹ and it would be to no longer trust in the Christ who hung on the cross.

C. The Understanding of Atonement

In his article, "The Cross in Contemporary Culture," Hall observes that "The difference between *theologia gloriae* and *theologia crucis* is the difference between salvation as resolution and salvation as engagement."² While a theology of glory stresses atonement theories in which deals are "made in the heavens" to resolve divine issues and which are based on a model of *theologia eterna*, Hall prefers to stress the primary importance of the cross as a ". . . symbol and 'means' of solidarity."³ It is an engagement between God and humanity, and among humans. Because the cross is the human condition, it is where God comes to be Emmanuel—God with us. It is through this solidarity with humanity that salvation comes about. Consequently, while the classical atonement theories interpret the cross as something which is special and apart from humanity, a theology of the cross takes the cross as the central symbol of humanity's true condition.⁴ Moreover, it does not seek to tranquillize human suffering in such a way that people falsely assume that it does not exist, but rather it provides the "salvific base from which the courage may be found willingly to participate in the suffering of the earth and its creatures."⁵

¹ Hall, "The Cross in Contemporary Culture," 201.

² *Ibid.*, 198.

³ Hall, "Rethinking Christ," 181.

⁴ Hall, "Rethinking Christ," 181; Lighten our Darkness, 145, 149-50; God and Human Suffering, 33-4, 118; Thinking the Faith, 176f.

⁵ Hall, Thinking the Faith, 28.

Hall contends that this aspect of human involvement or "contextuality is often missing in discussions about atonement.¹

Hall is also critical of the atonement theories which developed precisely within a church triumphant, rooted in the Constantinian era.² The emphasis on Christ as the Triumphant One, which Gustav Aulén called the *Christus Victor* atonement theory,³ stressed the victorious nature of Christ's death rather than his identification with human suffering.⁴ The second theory, as reflected by Anselm, put the stress on Christ's death as a payment of a debt which humanity was unable to pay; thus, a payment was worked out between God the Father and God the Son, apart from human involvement.⁵ Thirdly, the atonement theory of Abelard, which Hall is more open to, puts the stress on Christ as the perfect moral example to follow. Nevertheless, it still has as its focus the "cross of Jesus as something special and apart"⁶ from us, rather than on one who suffers with us. With the stress these theories placed on the historical event of salvation, the idea of the ongoing presence of God's solidarity with humanity as the agent of salvation is ignored. The idea of a victory--obtained either through a perfect life or through a heavenly transaction--is stressed more than the idea of God's solidarity with those who suffer. With this emphasis on

¹ Hall, Imaging God, 229, n. 4.

² See, for example, his comments in Thinking the Faith, 203.

³ Gustav Aulén, Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement, A. G. Hebert, trans. (London: S.P.C.K., 1931), 4ff.

⁴ Hall, "Rethinking Christ," 173-4; God and Human Suffering, 99ff.

⁵ Hall, God and Human Suffering, 135-6.

⁶ Hall, "Rethinking Christ," 181. Furthermore, when Christ is followed as a moral example for humanity, there is always the danger that the example imitated will not be the Incarnate and suffering Christ, but the victorious, conquering Christ. Idem., God and Human Suffering, 116.

victory, the cross is covered with roses. Hall rightly addresses and critiques this tendency of any theology of glory.

Hall is also critical of any atonement theories which separate the suffering of Christ from the suffering of God. He argues that

The passion of Jesus (*passio Christi*) is inseparable from the pathos of the God of Israel; indeed, when the cross of Christ is separated from the pathos of Yahweh it is greatly distorted, becoming on the one hand the soteriological basis for the heaven-bent world rejection of much avowed Christian orthodoxy, and on the other the model for that peculiar form of personal sentimentalism which characterizes bourgeois neo-Protestantism.¹

The attempt to cushion or protect God from the suffering of Christ, therefore, is a result of the theology of glory, for the image of a suffering God clashes with the beautiful, but untouched-by-suffering (*a-pathetic*) God which a theology of glory espouses. Furthermore, this artificial separation involves another denial of the reality of the human situation in which Christ was made incarnate.

There are some important differences between Hall and Luther, however, in the way they understand atonement. Luther stressed both a) the historical, salvific event made possible precisely because Jesus the Christ as God is distinct from the rest of humanity, and b) the fact that salvation comes through God's solidarity with a struggling humanity. On the other hand, Hall stresses primarily this second aspect because the first approach relies on the use of power:

It is the divine participation of a suffering love which alters the world, not through power but through solidarity with suffering humanity: "The suffering servant does not impose goodness upon the world by his power. Rather he suffers, being powerless, from the injustices of the powerful. He suffers most

¹ Hall, Thinking the Faith, 27.

particularly from the sins of the righteous who do not understand how full of unrighteousness is all human righteousness."¹

In the process of focusing on salvation occurring through Christ's solidarity with humanity, however, the cross as a historical event of salvation tends to be overlooked by Hall. Ironically, while he states that Christ has to identify with *our* humanity and not merely humanity *in general* in order for humanity to see him as truly human,² Christ must also be other than our humanity in order to be able to instill hope and the possibility of an open future for us. Something happened on the cross "for us," beyond revealing that God is "with us." This is what the atonement theories implicit in the "majority tradition" stressed. Hall is correct, though, in stating that the idea of salvation through God's solidarity with humanity has been greatly overlooked by this "majority tradition."

How significant these differences between Hall and Luther are, however, depends on how one defines justification. If justification is seen as being brought into the presence of a loving God by a faith which gives no guarantee of shelter from the struggles in this world, then Luther and Hall have similar aims, even though their methods differ. While Luther saw this as brought about by Christ's work on the cross rather than human works, Hall sees it happening through the action of God's expression of solidarity with a suffering humanity. In both cases, however, justification occurs through God's movement towards humanity and towards this world. It is a matter of *sola gratia*.

¹ Hall, "The Cross and Contemporary Culture," 198. Quotation taken from Reinhold Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy: Essays on the Christian Interpretation of History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937; Reissued as Christianity and Power Politics, 1940, 1969.), 181.

² Hall, "Rethinking Christ: Theological Reflections on Shusaku Endo's *Silence*," 266.

However, it must be said in all fairness that this emphasis on solidarity by Hall is only his primary soteriological stress.¹ In the North American context, an emphasis rightly needs to be placed on God being present in human suffering, for it is precisely this suffering that middle-class North Americans avoid. But what about those who are all too familiar with suffering and struggle--the "victims" in our society, as Hall calls them in Thinking the Faith?² The stress for them must be on hope, rather than entering into the darkness. They require God to do something "for them," beyond being "with them." Their context could be addressed by adopting what Luther called the "great reversals" inherent in a theology of the cross, which he discusses in his commentary on the Magnificat. This aspect of the theology of the cross would greatly enhance Hall's contextual programme by helping him to address the great diversity within the North American context. The theology of the cross is able to effectively address more than the "advantaged" in a society with a message of abandoning their "success mentality." They are in need of a great reversal. But so are those who are victims of society, and the great reversal they look for is far different than the one the advantaged are faced with. The beauty of the theology of the cross, however, is that it is able to address both positions--but only if it is allowed to contain the message of God-with-us *and* God-for-us. Both are integral in Luther's understanding of the theology of the cross.

¹ Hall, "Rethinking Christ", 181.

² Hall, Thinking the Faith, 134-6.

IV. CONCLUSION

While Hall and Luther are alike in their description of a theology of the cross as both a *methodology* and a specific *content* of Christian theology, there are some subtle but far-reaching differences.

First, for Luther, the main focus of the theology of the cross was its relationship to justification by grace through faith. As McGrath correctly notes, "the theology of the cross is thus a theology of faith, and faith alone. The correlative to *Crux sola* is *sola fide*, as it is through faith, and *through faith alone*, that the true significance of the cross is perceived."¹ Luther approached every issue he dealt with, whether it be indulgences, ecclesiology or the understanding of and the number of the sacraments, from the perspective of justification. As a result, he gives more attention to the Christology inherent in a theology of the cross than does Hall. This is most clearly revealed in the approaches taken with regard to atonement theories and the concept of the hidden and revealed God, as has been noted above. Luther's Christology formed the basis for his methodology. The opposite appears to be the case with Hall.

Furthermore, because the very nature of the theology of the cross is derived from the Incarnation and its attendant Christological implications, it must be questioned whether Hall can even begin a theological programme based on the theology of the cross from any starting point other than Christology. His proposal to not discuss Christology until sometime in the second volume of his proposed three volume work² reveals that he has made a significant break from Luther. Hall opts for the method implied in the theology of the cross, whereas Luther understood

¹ McGrath, Luther's Theology of the Cross (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 174.

² Hall, Thinking the Faith, 54f.

Christology as the necessary starting point. By doing so, however, Hall cuts himself off from much of the strength of the *theologia crucis*. It is only by beginning with the Incarnation of Christ as the clearest revelation of God that one is able to then consistently find a method for approaching other theological issues. In other words, it is precisely the theological content, or Christology, that provides the basis and rationale for the theology of the cross as a method for his theological endeavour.

Second, while Luther focused on the need for inversions or reversals as a part of the methodology of a theology of the cross, Hall tends to direct his attention more on the need of passing through the darkness into the light. Luther calls for an about face (*metanoia*), whereas Hall sees transformation occurring through a process of "entering into" the darkness. Most of the differences between the two is perhaps due to their different emphases. Luther focuses on the inversions needed in one's perceptions of God so that a person can confidently enter into the presence of God. This should then empower a person to face the darkness. Hall, on the other hand, focuses on methodology, which would presume that this inversion has already taken place, and now a person must reflect this by means of entering the darkness that already exists in the world. If this is indeed the case, then Luther and Hall would hold the same perspective.

Third, unlike Luther, Hall explicitly uses the theology of the cross as the basis and guiding principle for contextuality. This difference between them becomes clear in the areas of social ethics and the political and social ethos. Hall insists that a theology of the cross naturally leads to a political theology that is intimately concerned with the social issues which arise in any particular context.¹

¹ Hall, Lighten our Darkness, 146, 203-04; Thinking the Faith, 32.

Fourth, Luther applied his theology of the cross as a *method* primarily to theology (especially justification and one's understanding of grace) and ecclesiology. For example, his reform of the sacraments, whereby one criterion of a sacrament is that it contain some visible, earthly sign (making the sacraments "down-to-earth"), reflects one such application. Hall acknowledges that the application of a theology of the cross to theology, as Luther has done, is the most difficult task.¹ His own focus, however, is on its implications for the Christian life and our social ethos. For example, the Constantinian model of the church as "the official religion of an officially optimistic society" comes under his scrutiny.

Fifth, Hall goes far beyond Luther in his application of the theology of the cross to interfaith dialogue, especially that involving the Jewish faith. Luther's fight was limited to a dialogue within the Christian church. His remarks concerning the Jewish faith were, tragically, neither friendly nor based on his theology of the cross. Hall, however, offers three reasons for considering a theology of the cross as an ideal starting point for dialogue. First, and most importantly, it purifies the Christian faith of its triumphalism. Second, while the very name, "theology of the cross," is not altogether appropriate,² many of its themes have been borrowed from the Jewish faith. God's commitment to this world and solidarity with human beings in their struggles are themes common to both. Perhaps Hall's renaming of a theology of the cross as a "theology of beggars," and his downplaying of the idea of "cross as atonement," is an attempt to remove some of the obstacles placed in the way of this dialogue. Third, only a Christian faith which does not claim to know everything in advance as a *theologia eterna*, and which does not

¹ Hall, *Lighten our Darkness*, 204.

² Hall, "Rethinking Christ," 177.

have all the answers, can honestly enter a true dialogue with the Jewish faith. Only a theology of beggars is willing to look at and face up to the reality of Auschwitz.¹

The method which Hall finds inherent in a theology of the cross is therefore appropriate for an interfaith dialogue. Ironically, however, its specific content--that of the cross as the event of salvation--remains a stumbling block.² One must ask whether Hall's handling of the theology of the cross as a method and "way of life" downplays Christology as a whole, and not just the triumphalist Christology which he is at pains to remove. Because of the emphasis which Christianity has placed on Christology, to deal with interfaith dialogues honestly requires a willingness to face both the problems and the strengths Christianity has found in its Christological formulas. Hall is correct in seeing in the theology of the cross a method for approaching interfaith dialogue, but it is not clear from his writings if he is equally interested in allowing an integral Christology to remain as a cornerstone of the Christian faith. One must question whether an emphasis on Christology necessarily leads to a rejection of honest interfaith dialogues. Moreover, is Christianity truly represented by a position which finds in the cross a method for theological enterprise but not an integral christology? These are questions which Hall must address in any further development of his theology of the cross. Its explicit Christology cannot be ignored or reduced in significance if it is to remain a viable theological approach to interfaith dialogue.

¹ See, for example, Lighten our Darkness, 238, n.2.

² Hall argues at one point that it is *not* the cross that is the stumbling block to Judaism, since the cross, or what it symbolizes is already present in its own history, as even Luther noticed in his lectures on the Psalms. Rather, Hall thinks that the real stumbling block to Judaism is "a consequence of the translation of the relational categories belonging to the tradition of Jerusalem into the substantialist categories of Athens, especially as this translation relates to the doctrine of the Trinity, Christology, and soteriology." Imaging God, 224, n. 12.

Sixth, Luther's accent on justification emphasizes the *content* of the theology of the cross, whereas Hall emphasizes its *method*. In this sense, Hall's theology of the cross resembles the one found in Moltmann more than the one described by Luther.¹ Moreover, he has explored many of the far-reaching implications of the theology of the cross far beyond what Luther did. At this point, he is a more accurate, and a more faithful interpreter of Luther than those who would limit this theology to atonement theories. He has developed the theology of the cross from its embryonic stages in Luther's writings to address the various manifestations of the theology of glory prevalent in North American society today.

In the final analysis, Hall's programme of contextuality has many deep roots in Luther's theology of the cross. Not only is he quite accurate in his use of Luther's *theologia crucis* in those areas where he applies it, Hall is also able to derive from it ethical and social implications for our context which Luther either did not or was unable to address. This emphasis on contextuality as his key to a theology of the cross is supported by what he calls his favourite quote in all Christendom:

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the Truth of God except that little point where the world and the devil are in that moment contending, then I may be professing the faith but not confessing it. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is tested, and to be faithful on all the battlefield besides is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.²

¹ Compare, for example, Hall's emphasis on the political and ethical aspect of the theology of the cross with that of Moltmann in his works, *The Crucified God*, and "The Theology of the Cross Today," *The Future of Creation*, Margaret Kohl, trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 59-79. Both emphasize the methodological aspects of the theology of the cross more than its Christological basis.

² Quoted by Hall in "Luther's Theology of the Cross," 16; *Thinking the Faith*, 108. WABr 3: 81-2 (June 3, 1523 (?) letter to Count Albrecht of Mansfeld). Although this does reflect Luther's perspective, Hall's translation does not accurately reflect what is actually written in the text.

For Hall, that "small point in the battle" in our context is best addressed by a theology of the cross. It provides him with the justification to use the theology of the cross in ways which Luther never imagined. If the importance of dealing with this "one small point" is overlooked or denied, then a theology of the cross could be accused, along with much of Christian dogma, of dealing with questions and struggles of the past rather than being willing to deal with the present and the "open future."

CHAPTER SEVEN

BLACK THEOLOGY AND THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

I. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary theologians examined to this point have focused on socio-economic and cultural theology. James H. Cone, a Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, provides another perspective from which one can examine the possible relevance of a theology of the cross; namely, racism. Cone was one of the first African-Americans to develop a systematic theology from a black perspective. This "Black Theology," as he calls it, "asks the question, What does the Christian gospel have to say to powerless black men whose existence is threatened daily by the insidious tentacles of white power?"¹ Furthermore, it also aligns itself with Black Power in seeking liberation for blacks from white oppression.² In other words, Cone seeks to develop a theology that does not only reflect on the past, but encourages and, in fact, demands changes in the present and future.

With such an agenda, one has to deal from the very beginning with the question of whether it is even appropriate to compare Luther's theology of the cross to the theology of Cone. Luther is not central to his thought. When Luther is mentioned, it is often to note the difficulty

¹ James H. Cone, Black Theology and Black Power (New York: The Seabury Press, 1969), 32.

² Ibid., 6. "Black Power," a movement associated with Stokely Carmichael, arose in the 1960's. It involves both personal and political empowerment for blacks, which of course means great upheavals in the way things have been. Predictably, therefore, the term has struck fear into the hearts of many whites who have benefitted from the status quo. Only when this is understood, can the radical title of his book be understood.

he has with Luther's two-realms theory.¹ Further, Cone shuns European theologians in favour of black religious experiences and culture.² When he suggests that this white, European theology is the Anti-Christ because of its tacit support of racism,³ any attempt to look at Cone's theology from the perspective of Luther's theology of the cross would appear illegitimate.

However, Cone leaves the door open to a comparison of his work with Luther's theology of the cross for at least two reasons. First, he appears to approve of the *theologia crucis* on numerous occasions, even though he does not elaborate on its meaning or significance.⁴ His only critique of the theology of the cross is that in Luther it lacks a socio-political analysis⁵ while later theologians fail to extend its implications to society.⁶ Second, Black Theology was developed to express Christian theology in terms of the black experience. In the process the traditional, European, and white dominant theology is critiqued. As a "minority tradition,"

¹ James H. Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippencott Co., 1970), 70-72; "Reflections from the Perspective of US Blacks: Black Theology and Third World Theologies," Irruptions of the Third World, V. Fabella and S. Torres, eds., (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983), 239; "Black Theology as Public Theology in America," Civil Religion and Political Theology, Leroy S. Rouner, ed., (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 200. It appears that he has trouble with both Luther's two-realm theory and later Lutheran scholars' interpretations of the theory, primarily because it supports the status quo. Liberation, 166; God of the Oppressed, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1975), 198-200.

² As he explains, "Can theology be black if it uses European theological and philosophical concepts as the primary tools for its interpretation of human existence?" Cone, For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 83.

³ Cone, Black Theology, 73; Liberation, 25, 29.

⁴ Cone, "Black Theology as Public Theology in America," 200; "Reflections from the perspective of US Blacks," 239; My Soul Looks Back (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986), 105.

⁵ Cone, "Reflections from the Perspective of US Blacks," 242.

⁶ Cone, For My People, 182, 188; My Soul Looks Back, 105.

however, Luther's theology of the cross also confronted this dominant theology. Thus, a comparison of Luther's theology of the cross and Cone's Black Theology may reveal the need for, and consistency of, these "minority traditions" which have not been much loved in the Christian church. The aim, therefore, in this chapter is not to make Black Theology into something it is not; rather, it is to compare it to another minority tradition which recognized the importance and significance of the Incarnation and cross, and the need for theology to be contextual.

II. THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS AS A CHRISTOLOGY

For Cone, as for Luther, Christ is the starting point for all theology. As Cone states, "Christian theology begins and ends with Jesus Christ."¹ This statement does not, however, suggest what it is about Jesus Christ that justifies such a claim. Therefore, in the comparison of the Christologies of both Cone and Luther, the revelation of God in Christ, its implications for faith, and the atoning significance of Christ need to be explored.

A. The Hidden and Revealed God

Both Luther and Cone recognize that God's actions are often hidden in history, so that only through the eyes of faith can the presence of God be revealed.² Cone further suggests,

¹ Cone, Liberation, 197. He makes similar statements in Black Theology, 34; and God of the Oppressed, 34.

² Cone, Liberation, 95.

however, that in the Incarnation, God not only becomes human, but chooses to become hidden in an *oppressed* human. He explains:

The basic mistake of our white opponents is their failure to see that God did not become a universal man but an oppressed Jew, thereby disclosing to us that both man's nature and God's are inseparable from oppression and liberation.¹

What is said of the Incarnation is also true of the cross. It does more than reveal that Christ died "for our sins;" it reveals that God became identified with the victims of oppression.² This failure to see that God is hidden in those who are oppressed, however, is common; it is characteristic of human perceptions of God. It is difficult to understand that God can be hidden among humanity or that God in Christ was hanging on the cross, without eyes of faith. But to suggest that God is hidden in Christ among the oppressed, for the purpose of bringing about liberation, is even more difficult to comprehend.³ In the contemporary North American context, the only way this hiddenness can be visualized is by portraying Christ as a black person in the ghettos. As Cone vividly writes;

He meets the blacks where they are and becomes one of them. We see him there with his black face and big black hands lounging on a streetcorner. "Oh, but surely Christ is above race." But society is not raceless, any more than when God became a despised Jew. White liberal preference for a raceless Christ serves only to make official and orthodox the centuries-old portrayal of Christ as white. The "raceless" American Christ has a light skin, wavy brown hair, and sometimes--wonder of wonders--blue eyes. For whites to find him with big lips and kinky hair is as offensive as it was for the Pharisees to find him partying with tax-collectors. But whether whites want to hear it or not, *Christ is black, baby*, with all of the features which are so detestable to white society.⁴

¹ Cone, Liberation, 157.

Cone, Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986), 6.

³ Cone, Liberation, 222.

⁴ Cone, Black Theology, 68. He makes similar statements about the radicalness of the Incarnation in Liberation, 120-125.

Furthermore, Christ becomes a black person who lives in the ghettos. Both aspects are central to a full description of what the Incarnation meant for Christ in his context, and what it means for today. Christ was from the wrong race and the wrong economic class.¹

Cone is not content to stop here, however. While it is crucial to see Christ hidden among and revealed to an oppressed people, this Incarnation is for a very specific purpose. As Cone states, "Revelation is God's self disclosure to man *in a situation of liberation*."² It is because of this revelation, or self-disclosure of God's plan of liberating the oppressed that Cone is able to argue that the oppressed and the oppressors have not had the same revelation of God:³ the God of liberation is hidden from the view of the oppressors. This, of course, creates a scandal for the oppressors:

¹ Cone suggests that God speaks the following words to black people in North America: "I became poor in Christ in order that man may not be poor. I am in the ghetto where rats and disease threaten the very existence of my people...I know the meaning of rejection because in Christ I was rejected; the meaning of physical pain because I was crucified; the meaning of death because I died." Cone, Black Theology, 46.

² Cone, Liberation, 91. He believes that God is "transforming human events into divine events of liberation." Ibid., 151.

³ Ibid., 113. Cone suggests that for the oppressed, God is revealed as one who breaks the chains of slavery, while to the oppressors, God supports the status quo. One must raise the question, then, as to whether the oppressors can accept the Incarnate God, who has chosen to be hidden among the oppressed, and who has come to liberate them from oppression! See also, God of the Oppressed, 34.

It is from this perspective that Cone is able to talk about the righteousness of God. He stresses that the righteousness of God is not an abstract quality, but rather an activity in human history. It implies that "God is doing justice, that he is putting right what men have made wrong." Black Theology, 44. Furthermore, "If God is to be true to himself, his righteousness must be directed to the helpless and the poor, those who can expect no security from this world. The rich, the secure, the suburbanite can have no part of God's righteousness because of their trust and dependence on the things of this world." Ibid., 45.

The scandal is that the gospel means liberation, that this liberation comes to the poor, and that it gives them the strength and the courage to break the conditions of servitude. This is what the incarnation means.¹

While God is hidden among the marginalized and the oppressed, as Luther suggests, Cone identifies and names the oppressed in contemporary North American society as the black people. Yet he avoids developing a very narrowly defined ethnic theology by making it clear that blackness is to be considered a powerful identifying symbol of the oppressed. Being black in America, he suggests, has very little to do with skin colour. Rather, it means being where the dispossessed are.²

A second aspect of the hidden and revealed God is that God has chosen to be revealed in an "earthly" way, rather than through heavenly speculations. Luther's attack on speculative theology follows from his stress on the Incarnation as God's chosen self-revelation: Cone's *Black Theology* also contains a strong anti-speculative content.³ However, Cone expands on Luther's definition of speculative theology. While Luther attacked those who speculated on what God was like in heaven, Cone also criticizes those who talk of an Incarnate God apart from a specific

¹ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 77.

² Cone, *Black Theology*, 151. On the other hand, his definition of whites, while having obvious references to the dominant white, European ethnic groups in the United States, means more than that. He writes; "Whiteness, as revealed in the history of America, is the expression of what is wrong with man. It is a symbol of man's depravity. God cannot be white, even though white churches have portrayed him as white." *Ibid.*, 150.

³ This reflects Cone's doctoral work on Barth. He summarizes Barth's position thus: ". . . all theological talk about God, man, church, etc., must inevitably proceed from Jesus Christ, who is the sole criterion for every Christian utterance. To talk of God or of man without first talking about Jesus Christ is to engage in idle, abstract words which have no relation to the Christian experience of revelation." *Black Theology*, 34. Following Wolfhart Pannenberg's attack on anti-speculative theology, such as found in Bultmann's stress on the kerygmatic Christ, Cone also argues that the focus of Christian theology must be the Incarnate and historical Jesus Christ. *Ibid.*, 34-35.

human context. It is still speculative theology if a theologian does not recognize that Christ became incarnate among the black and the oppressed of society:

. . . much of this abstract theological disputation and speculation--the favorite pastime for many theological societies--serves as a substitute for relevant involvement in a world where men die for lack of political justice.¹

A speculative theology, then, is any theology which does not focus on what God's righteousness means for daily life. Theology must leave this speculation behind and face the human context, a context which for America, involves the issue of racism.²

Cone suggests that speculative theology is not a part of Black Theology. Because of their oppression, they worship a God who is involved in their history rather than a metaphysical god reserved for those who are free of struggles and oppression. For Black Theology, Jesus is not some abstract Word, but a God rooted in the history of God's people.³ As he states, "Theology derived from the moans of and shouts of oppressed black people defines a different set of problems than those found in the white theological textbooks."⁴ Black people do not have time to speculate; they are too busy fighting to survive.

A third aspect of the theme of the hidden and revealed God, as outlined by Luther, is that of the distinction between the alien and the proper work of God. It is through God's alien work that God's proper work is revealed. While this theme is not dominant in Cone, it is present. It is reflected, for example, in his understanding of the "otherness" of God. The alien work of God

¹ Cone, Black Theology, 43.

² *Ibid.*, 83.

³ Cone, God of the Oppressed, 55. See also For My People, 148.

⁴ Cone, Speaking the Truth, 11. He also suggests that this theology leaves itself open to becoming a spectator theology, which is another problem with white theology. (God of the Oppressed, 183).

is nothing else than God's choice to become Incarnate among blacks. As Cone notes, "God comes to us in his blackness which is wholly unlike whiteness..."¹ He even suggests that God's alien work involves rejecting the "white god" and choosing instead the God of the Oppressed.² Another alien work of God is found in fighting against racism by refusing to accept the "love" or the "assistance" of whites until justice is achieved.³

The direction which Cone takes here suggests that the alien and proper work of God is reflected in inversions. It is by God choosing blacks, slaves, the poor, and the powerless that the reign of God is revealed to the world: but these people are considered strangers or aliens in a world controlled by the suburbanites of America.⁴ Yet it is precisely through those who are alien to this secure world that God seeks to transform America from a nightmare to a dream.⁵

Cone does not discount the possibility of black violence (in response to the oppressive, structural and systematic violence from the white people over the last few centuries) as another possible alien work of God meant to bring about God's proper work of justice.⁶ It is through

¹ Cone, Liberation, 125.

² *Ibid.*, 111-12.

³ Cone, Black Theology, 54. Cone quotes Tillich here, who states, "It is the strange work of love to destroy what is against love." Paul Tillich, Love, Power, and Justice (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960; a Galaxy Book), 49. See also Cone, Liberation, 132f.

⁴ Cone, Black Theology, 64, 69.

⁵ Cone, "America: A Dream or a Nightmare?" The Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center 13 (Spring 1986), 263-278. Cone describes the themes of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X as a "dream" and "nightmare," respectively, based on their speeches and writings. See also his latest book, Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare? (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991).

⁶ Cone, Black Theology, 113, 138ff. While the issue of violence by the Black Power movement has offended most white Christians, overlooked is the violence the blacks have continually suffered. As Cone states, "White people are not really concerned about violence in (continued...)"

the fulfilment of the alien work of God--or more accurately, the hope that such inversions will take place--that God's proper work is revealed in this world.¹ Certainly violence does not seem to be a proper work of God; yet there are scriptural antecedents suggesting that there are times in Israel's history where violence (war) by the Israelites or by their enemies accomplished God's proper work. The alien work of the God who has chosen to be hidden among the people most removed from a white, suburbanite community nevertheless brings about God's own proper work of salvation through these rejected and alienated ones.

B. The Understanding of Faith

For both Luther and Cone, faith is not something gained by logical deductions or speculations. Only by faith is the hidden God revealed. As Cone notes, faith "enables man to recognize God's actions in human history."² The revelation of God, furthermore, can only be perceived within the community of faith. In this sense, Cone's definition of faith is very similar to Luther's basic definition of faith as trust in God.³ Those who are oppressed trust God for

⁶(...continued)

all cases but only when they are the victims. As long as blacks are beaten and shot, they are strangely silent, as if they are unaware of the inhumanity committed against the black community." God of the Oppressed, 195-96. See also 217.

¹ Cone, "Black Theology as Public Theology in America," 189.

² Cone, Liberation, 95. He states, "Faith then is the existential recognition of a situation of oppression and a participation in God's liberation." Such a statement requires some qualification, however, and it also requires a more precise definition of faith before it can be accepted as it is.

³ Cone suggests that "the distinctive characteristic of faith is its total commitment to that which functions as the ultimate in one's life." Speaking the Truth, 40. A total commitment to someone or something involves a complete trust in that person or the activity which that person is involved in. In this sense, faith in God can be seen as the ultimate in one's life.

their liberation, and yet at the same time, the gift of faith, which God has given them in their times of trouble,¹ inspires them to fight against all attempts to make them into "non-beings."²

The second point that both Luther and Cone make about faith is that it is centred on Christ. Cone emphasizes that faith is not just an ultimate commitment to something or someone; it is a total commitment to a particular God who is revealed in Jesus of Nazareth,³ the very "essence of Christianity,"⁴ This Christocentric emphasis is a dominant theme for Cone, both for faith and for his understanding of the hiddenness of God.⁵

A third aspect of faith for Luther was that faith was not to be understood as that which provides a present security in this world or an "escape" to a future world. Christians are to trust only in the certainties of God's promises, and not in false security offered by earthly possessions. Cone also understands faith in this way. While many of the black spirituals would suggest the idea of heaven as an escape from this world, closer analysis reveals that this is not the case.⁶ In fact, as Cone states,

The idea of heaven is irrelevant for Black Theology. The Christian cannot waste time contemplating the next world (if there is a next). Radical obedience to

¹ Cone, God of the Oppressed, 194.

² Cone, Liberation, 95.

³ Cone, Speaking the Truth, 40.

⁴ Cone, Black Theology, 34.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 34; and For My People, 165-66, for example, reveal the Christological emphasis for Cone in one of his earliest and latest writings, respectively.

⁶ Cone, in his book The Spirituals and the Blues (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972), 86-108, discusses the theme of heaven in the spirituals. Prior to the abolition of slavery, it often meant "the north" or "Canada," places where slavery was less prevalent.

Christ means that reward cannot be the motive for action. It is a denial of faith to insist on the relevance of reward.¹

Faith involves a trust that knows God will act in this life, not just in heaven, because faith cannot be separated from justice.² Otherwise, faith in a God who acts only in heaven would indeed be an opium for black people.³ A salvation which only prepares us for heaven functions as an escape from the world and the demands for justice.⁴

While faith is not meant to allow humanity to escape from the struggles in this world, it is also not to be equated with the common white theology notion that it is to be rewarded by worldly successes.⁵ Cone suggests that this success mentality, which leads to trust in the things of the world, gets in the way of an absolute dependence or trust in God.⁶ He states:

¹ Cone, Black Theology, 125. Here Cone differs from Luther, who had no problem with the idea of rewards. In his Isaiah Commentary, for example, Luther suggests that the gospel does bring rewards. What he insists, however, is that these rewards are given as a result of Christ's works, and not human efforts. LW 17:15; WA 31/II: 271.32-272.10 (1527-1530 Isaiah Commentary). The theme of rewards is also present in Scripture. For example, Psalm 58:11 speaks of the rewards the righteous will receive. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:12) and the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:23), Jesus talks about the great reward in heaven for those who are faithful. In his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, Luther argues that heavenly rewards provide comfort to those suffering. LW 21: 50-52; WA 32: 339.34-341.32 (Sermon on the Mount, 1521). In this sense, rewards are indeed relevant to, and not a denial of, the Christian faith, contrary to what Cone suggests.

² Cone, "Black Theology as Public Theology in America," 189-90.

³ Cone, God of the Oppressed, 129-130.

⁴ Cone, Liberation, 225, 241-47. Cone argues that this is the kind of faith that the white people encouraged the blacks to have when the blacks were their slaves: it made them obedient slaves. It was also the kind of faith that many black churches proclaimed after the civil war, and it is therefore reflected in these later spirituals. But it is a product of white faith, rather than the faith which is found among blacks who take the Incarnation seriously and who believe that God is committed to bringing about justice in this world.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁶ Cone, Black Theology, 45.

- ...whatever the Christian faith may be, it is never a reflection of the values of the dominant culture. ...the birth, life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus mean that God turns the world's value system upside down.¹

Only when the values of the dominant culture, which suggest that faith is rewarded by success, are overturned do people trust in God alone. Thus, the faith espoused by the "electronic church" (which often measures faith by material success), is nothing more than worshipping false gods.² In Luther's terms, it is to follow a theology of glory rather than a theology of the cross.

Rather than a security in this world, faith is a risk. It involves applying God's self-revelation to the present context in specific ways.³ For Luther, this meant facing issues directly, making choices about what our faith means in each specific context. It meant to "sin boldly, but to trust in God's grace even more boldly."⁴ Cone reflects similar thinking. For example, he quotes and then comments on the words of Jose Bonino;

"A Christian must think through the question of revolution on the basis of his faith and he must express this interpretation in the concrete situation and translate it into action." This means that the Christian is placed in a situation in which he alone makes the choice.⁵

The choices made may not always be the right ones, but since the future is unknown and all the implications of any decision cannot be known, faith has to be based on an absolute trust in God rather than on guaranteed outcomes. Faith involves risk. It is not paralysed into inaction

¹ Cone, Speaking the Truth, 120.

² Cone, For My People, 120.

³ Cone, Liberation, 27.

⁴ LW 48: 282; WABr 2: 372 (August 1, 1521 letter to Melanchthon).

⁵ Cone, Black Theology, 142. The José Miguez-Bonino quote is taken from his article, "Christians and the Political Revolution," The Development Apocalypse, special U.S. edition of Risk, edited by Stephen Rose and Peter Vav Lelyveld (1967), 114-15.

for fear of making a mistake. As Cone notes, no one is infallible, not even the oppressed, who may know the context the most intimately.¹

Finally, a theology of faith is a theology of *Anfechtung*, according to Luther. Faith in the Incarnate God brings a person into contact with the struggles and temptations in this world. It is within this context that the Christian lives out the life of faith. In many respects, Black Theology strives to stress the same thing. For Black Theology, a life of faith naturally involves a person in suffering and struggles:

People who live in the world have to encounter the concreteness of suffering without suburbs as places of retreat. To be oppressed is to encounter the overwhelming presence of human evil without any place to escape. Either we submit or we rebel, knowing that our physical lives are at stake.²

Cone is quick to realize, however, that black suffering reveals a major contradiction between the white and the black churches. It is not easy for blacks to understand why they suffer and other (white) Christians do not.³ Only faith can give "meaning in a meaningless situation, enabling the oppressed to believe that there is One greater than the power of the oppressors."⁴ Thus, faith is a living in the midst of the struggle, trusting in God's desire and promises for liberation of all

¹ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 208. As he states, "...since God's will does not come in the form of absolute principles applicable for all situations, our obedience to the divine will involves the risk of faith. The risk of faith means that the oppressed are not infallible."

² Cone, *Liberation*, 234.

³ Cone, *Black Theology*, 98ff; *God of the Oppressed*, 188ff. Elsewhere he notes that it is very difficult to have faith in the righteousness of God for black people. Their faith does not cancel the pain suffered as slaves or the anguish over the fact that God has not yet liberated them. "The Meaning of God in the Black Spirituals," *God as Father? Concilium* 143, Johannes B. Metz and Edward Schillibeeckx, eds. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark; New York: The Seabury Press, 1981), 59.

⁴ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 194. See also *Speaking the Truth*, 57.

the oppressed. Cone concludes, "People who experience no conflict do not think theologically."¹ It is in the midst of this struggle, in the midst of suffering, that one's faith is lived out. This faith gives a people their identity, but it also determines what they must do to live out their faith in a racist society. In this sense, the faith involved in *Anfechtung* involves a trust in God despite the absence of worldly security, but it also compels those who live by faith to put the gift of faith to good use in their struggle for liberation.² The faith present in a theology of *Anfechtung*, therefore, is not passive or submissive.

C. The Understanding of Atonement

Luther's emphasis that atonement is not something worked out in the heavens, apart from humanity, is echoed in Cone's Black Theology. As Cone writes, "Salvation...primarily has to do with earthly reality and the injustice inflicted on those who are helpless and poor."³

Black Theology, like the theology of the cross, argues that atonement is brought about by God acting both for us and with us. The story of the People of Israel reveals that God not only fights for them, but becomes oppressed with them in order to deliver them.⁴ As Cone

¹ Cone, *Speaking the Truth*, 58. A distinction must be made between "evil" and "good" suffering, however. This will be discussed later.

² *Ibid.*, 40.

³ Cone, *Liberation*, 227. He notes that white Christians only decided to teach the slaves the Christian faith when it was determined that salvation had little to do with civil freedom, and that it would make them more obedient. *Liberation*, 224-25. Elsewhere, he notes, however, that contrary to such a view, salvation is actually meant to liberate people from alien loyalties; therefore the work of Christ is primarily a work of liberation. *Black Theology*, 39, 42.

⁴ Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 139.

recognizes, "The theological significance of the cross and resurrection is what makes the life of Jesus more than just the life of a good man who happened to like the poor."¹

This dichotomy between God-for-us and God-with-us is expressed in two statements by Cone. On the one hand, God brings about our salvation through identification with us:

It is because we have encountered Christ in our historical situation and have been given the faith to struggle for truth that we are forced to enquire about the meaning of this truth for the totality of human existence.²

On the other hand, the God-for-us aspect must also be considered:

The meaning of Christ is not derived from nor dependent upon our social context. There is an otherness which we experience in the encounter with Christ that forces us to look beyond our immediate experience to other witnesses.³

God is with people in their suffering, in the person of Jesus (God-with-us), to such an extent that Cone can suggest that God saves by becoming black.⁴ Yet God also acts for people in ways that are beyond their powers, "coming on the clouds of heaven" (God-for-us).⁵ While the cross of Jesus reveals the extent of God's involvement in the suffering of the powerless, God is not merely sympathetic to their plight; instead, in Christ, God becomes totally identified with the oppressed.⁶ This solidarity with humanity empowers black people to struggle against all who

¹ Cone, Liberation, 210. For this reason, Cone disagrees with Pannenberg, whom, he argues, overreacts to Bultmann's emphasis on the Christ of faith, suggesting that the historicity of Jesus is enough for Christology. As Cone suggests, "we do not have to choose between a Christology either "from below" or "from above." Instead, we should keep both in dialectical relation..." God of the Oppressed, 121.

² Cone, God of the Oppressed, 109.

³ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁴ Cone, Black Theology, 68-69.

⁵ Cone, God of the Oppressed, 140.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 175.

would oppress them. Yet they also know that they cannot break the chains of slavery by themselves: their own strength is not enough. The fight for justice is tiring and demanding because of the constant fear of retaliation.¹ Thus, if salvation (liberation) is to come, it must come through God acting for them. Only God can bring about an inversion of the presently oppressive structures of society.²

The cross and resurrection of Jesus, therefore, are not only acts of solidarity; they reveal God's actions on behalf of the oppressed in bringing about an inversion. Both God's identification with the oppressed, and God's actions of liberation, moreover, occur in ways that are hidden to those without the eyes of faith. To identify with the oppressed seems useless to the powerful; the cross seems a sign of weakness and failure rather than an act of liberation.

While Cone's Black Theology reveals a balance between the two aspects of atonement that Luther stressed, there are some differences. For Luther, atonement was concerned primarily with making one righteous in the presence of God. This is done by God's unilateral actions undertaken in the person of Christ, through his cross and resurrection, but also in the very act of solidarity that occurs in the Incarnation. For the most part, Luther does not develop it further. Cone, on the other hand, is not content to deal with atonement in terms of righteousness in the presence of God. For him, atonement also has to do with righteousness or justice in the presence of one another because of one's righteousness before God. Not only does atonement make one right with God, it should make one right with others. It is understandable, then, that Cone defines atonement in terms of reconciliation. Reconciliation with God and with one another

¹ Cone, God of the Oppressed, 132.

² Even if salvation is defined in terms of becoming fully human, which for black people means an affirmation of one's blackness, it is recognized by Black Theology that this can take place only because of the reconciling acts of Jesus Christ. Cone, Black Theology, 149.

involves God's actions and God's solidarity with us for it to be possible. But reconciliation also implies justice. There can be no reconciliation among people without first having justice--removing those things which prevent or inhibit justice from happening.¹ As Cone recognizes;

Reconciliation then is not only what God does in order to deliver oppressed people from captivity; it is also what oppressed people do in order to remain faithful to their new gift of freedom. Reconciliation is not only justification, God's righteous deliverance of slaves from bondage; it is sanctification, the slaves' acceptance of their new way of life, their refusal to define existence in any other way than in freedom. Reconciliation is not simply freedom *from* oppression and slavery; it is also freedom *for* God.²

Thus, while Luther was concerned with being made righteous in the presence of God, so that one could be free to live a life of service to the neighbour, Cone focuses more on the implications of this "right standing with God" in terms of God bringing justice to the oppressed.

III. THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS AS A METHODOLOGY

It is obvious from an analysis of the Christology in the Black Theology of James Cone that one cannot separate it from the concrete historical context. When one looks at his methodological principles, much of what was said in his discussion of Christology, especially in terms of the Incarnation and cross as the starting point, is also relevant here.

Cone gives a clear outline of his methodological principles for doing theology in his 1984 book, For My People: first, theology must reflect on the meaning of God in solidarity with the poor; second, it must involve a social analysis; third, it involves a re-reading of the bible from

¹ Cone, Black Theology, 148.

² Cone, God of the Oppressed, 233.

the historical perspective of the oppressed; and fourth, it must develop its theology from the sources of the oppressed peoples rather than from foreign systems.¹ These four principles have similarities with the three main themes found in the methodology of Luther's theology of the cross. This allows for a fairly straightforward comparison of the methodology of Cone's theology with that of Luther's *theologia crucis*, despite their quite different historical contexts.

A. The Incarnation, Cross and Solidarity

Right from the outset, Cone argues that the self-revelation of God in the Incarnation must be the starting point in doing theology, since it is this that makes theology Christian.² However, this self-revelation takes place within a very specific historical context: God becomes Incarnate among the poor and the oppressed.³ As Cone vividly states:

The appearance of Jesus as the Oppressed One whose existence is identified exclusively with the oppressed of the land is symbolically characterized in his birth. He was born in a stable and cradled in a manger (the equivalent of a beer case in a ghetto alley), "because there was no place for them in the inn (Luke 2:7).⁴

Elsewhere, however, this Incarnational starting point seems put aside by Cone. For example, he writes, "there can be no Black Theology which does not take the black experience

¹ Cone, For My People, 147ff.

² Cone, Black Theology, 120-21; Liberation, 24, 197.

³ Cone is not willing, therefore, to settle for a docetic Christ; that would not be an Incarnation, but merely an "idea-principle in a theological system." God of the Oppressed, 118. Furthermore, by becoming human, God clearly takes humanity seriously. Speaking the Truth, 58-9.

⁴ Cone, Liberation 204. He also notes that "His messiahship means that he is one of the humiliated and the abused, even in his birth. His eating with tax collectors and sinners, therefore, was not an accident and neither was it a later invention of the early church; rather it is an expression of the being of God himself and thus a part of Jesus' purpose for being born. Ibid., 205.

as a source for its starting point."¹ This suggests that either Cone is contradicting himself, or he is pointing to another aspect of the Incarnation. In fact, the latter is the case. Only when the Incarnation is understood as an identification of God with the black experience, can it truly be an Incarnation and not some modified form of docetism. Only when the Incarnation can be seen as God's involvement in the ghetto will it make any sense to blacks.²

Second, because of the Incarnational starting point, any theology of ascent is quickly dismissed.³ If theology is to serve the real needs of the church, it must become, says Cone, a "worldly theology."⁴ "White theology," on the other hand, has corrupted the black church by telling "the 'white lie' that Christianity is primarily concerned with an otherworldly reality."⁵ Such a false representation leads Cone to suggest that white theology is not even Christian theology, since it has been written with no references to the oppressed of the land.⁶ It takes neither the Incarnation nor the context of the oppressed seriously.

¹ Cone, God of the Oppressed, 17-18. Note that Cone sees Black experience as a starting point, not the only starting point. This prevents the Black experience from contradicting the Incarnational starting point. Rather, it is an aspect of the Incarnational starting point.

² Cone, Black Theology, 32.

³ Cone agrees with Barth's critique of those who would suggest that a relationship with God can be initiated by humans ascending to God. Liberation, 97-98.

⁴ Cone, Black Theology, 84. Cone continues; "This means that [theology] must make sure that the Church is in the world and that its word and deed are harmonious with Jesus Christ. . . . Theology is not, then, an intellectual exercise but a worldly risk." *Ibid.*, 84.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 121. Cone expresses this in a graphic way by recounting a story: "The black man stood on the corner and said, 'take the world and give me Jesus.' So that's just what the white man did. 'Jesus will help us' the black man said. Hell, Jesus couldn't even help his own self. He fooled around and got himself nailed to the cross." Quoted in Gordon Parks, "Stokely Carmichael," Life, (May 19, 1967), 82. As quoted by Cone, Black Theology, 123.

⁶ Cone, Liberation, 28, note 4.

Third, an Incarnational starting point places a strong emphasis on solidarity, which Cone stresses by referring to Christ as black. To claim that Christ is black highlights the specific context of the Incarnation, as well as "the *concreteness* of Christ's continued presence today."¹ Christ enters the world of the poor and the despised, the world of the ghetto.² Making the black condition his own condition is a continuation of his Incarnation in the twentieth-century North American context.³

Fourth, the Incarnation, itself an inversion, suggests that inversions or reversals are also a central aspect to the theological enterprise.⁴ What has traditionally been rejected is now affirmed. Cone states, "To be human in a condition of social oppression always involves affirming that which the oppressor regards as degrading."⁵ It also involves an inversion of what

¹ Cone, Liberation, 218-19.

² Cone, God of the Oppressed, 136. Elsewhere, Cone writes, "If he is not in the ghetto, if he is not where men are living at the brink of existence, but is, rather, in the easy life of the suburbs, then the gospel is a lie." Black Theology, 38.

³ Cone, Liberation, 36. See also Black Theology, 68-9; Liberation, 105, 215-16; Speaking the Truth, 90. In reflecting on the history of the religion of black slaves, Cone contends, "In the suffering of Jesus, black slaves experienced an existential solidarity with him: 'Were you there when they crucified my Lord?' and 'he never said a mumblin' word.' They also experienced Jesus' solidarity with them. Jesus was present with them as their companion in their misery and their liberator from it into a resurrected experience: 'There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole'." The task of theology, therefore, is to make the gospel clear in a particular social context, so that the people of God will know that their struggle for freedom is also God's struggle, and thus recognize God's solidarity with them in this struggle. Idem, God of the Oppressed, 99.

⁴ These inversions are, he suggests, a theological version of the "Copernican revolution." Cone, Liberation, 121.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 41. Cone, like Luther, supports the idea of inversions from scripture. God's choosing of the oppressed Israelites rather than the Egyptian oppressors, as well as the New Testament gospel of liberation reveal actions of reversal. Idem, God of the Oppressed, 65, 78. Scriptures reveal, he concludes, that "whatever the Christian faith may be, it is never a reflection of the values of the dominant culture. . . . the birth, life, teachings, death and resurrection turn
(continued...)

has traditionally been understood or accepted as church. At times this is expressed in terms of a *via negativa*; of actually seeking the death of the church before it can be resurrected.¹ Society is also affected:

When the meaning of Christianity is derived from the bottom and not the top of the socio-economic ladder, from people who are engaged in the fight for justice and not from those who seek to maintain the status quo, then something radical and revolutionary happens to the function of the "holy" in the context of the "secular." Viewed from the perspective of oppressed peoples' struggle for freedom, the holy becomes a radical challenge to the legitimacy of the secular structures of power by creating eschatological images about a realm of experience that is not confined to the values of this world. This is the strange and revolutionary character of Christianity that is so often misunderstood by church and nonchurch people alike.²

Black Theology defines these inversions in terms of black theology and white theology. As such, Black Theology involves creating a new understanding of black dignity, and an affirmation of blackness; on the other hand, whiteness is rejected, since it has become symbolic

⁵(...continued)

the world's value systems upside down." Idem, Speaking the Truth, 120.

This theme of inversion is also found, to various degrees, in the folklore of black people. Many of the heroes of the blacks, and many of the sermons of black preachers (especially before the American Civil War), reveal the need and possibility of inversions. Br'er Rabbit and High John the Conqueror, for example, were figures who, by trickery, cunning or wit, brought about inversions. Idem, God of the Oppressed, 17-30.

One of the criticisms levelled against Cone in his first two books (Black Theology and Liberation) was that he tried to develop a Black Theology out of the ashes of white, European theology, while not taking the black experience seriously enough. He tries to rectify this in his later books, beginning with The Spirituals and the Blues. Much of the hope of black people was predicated on the vision that these inversions would indeed take place.

This re-reading of scripture and the drawing upon black experience are also two of Cone's methodological principles. While there are obvious connections with the theme of inversions, they are also developed further in his defining of reality and in his challenges to church and society.

¹ Cone, Black Theology, 116.

² Cone, Speaking the Truth, 35-6.

of oppression and evil for black people.¹ "Black, therefore, is beautiful because the oppressor has made it ugly."² Cone succinctly sums up the need for inversions when he writes,

In order to be Christian theology, white theology must cease being *white* theology and become Black Theology by denying whiteness as a proper form of human existence and affirming blackness as God's intention for humanity.³

This approach suggests that black people must do more than identify where inversions are needed; they must also become involved in bringing these inversions about.⁴ Their task, therefore, is to rebel against white masters, "destroying their pretensions to authority and ridiculing the symbols of power. White people must be made to realize that reconciliation is a costly experience."⁵

B. Dealing Honestly with Reality

From a theological perspective, Luther insisted on taking the cross of Christ seriously. Any attempt to remove its harsh reality was unacceptable, and indicated an unwillingness to deal with the reality of the cross.

Cone does not shy away from such a discussion. His emphasis on the contextual implications of the Incarnation prevents theological theories of Christ's death from overshadowing

¹ Cone, Black Theology, 117; Cone further notes, "...white rejection of Black Theology stems from a recognition of the revolutionary implications in the very phrase; a rejection of whiteness, and unwillingness to live under it, and an identification of whiteness with evil and blackness with good." Liberation, 30.

² Cone, Liberation, 41.

³ *Ibid.*, 32-3. See also, God of the Oppressed, 195.

⁴ Cone suggests that they need to "force a radical revolutionary confrontation." Liberation, 41. See also 220.

⁵ Cone, God of the Oppressed, 238-39.

its reality.¹ This approach is central to the *theologia crucis*. As will be seen, Cone follows Luther's dictum to "call a thing what it actually is."² Much of Cone's work, in fact, is involved precisely in doing exactly this. However, there are many factors involved in such a project.

The first factor in the bid to "call a thing what it is," is to determine which one of the voices that claim to define reality should be heard. This requires social analysis.³ The voices of the oppressors, for example, would have one believe that change is not feasible or possible,⁴ and that the themes of liberation and freedom in scripture are meant only in the spiritual sense.⁵ But this is not the voice of the oppressed! While it is true that in some sense all are oppressed, Cone is adamant that the "oppression" which the oppressors "experience" is radically different than that experienced by the victims in society.⁶ To distinguish the voices, one must ask, "Who stands to benefit from the status quo?"⁷ For Cone, it is clearly not the blacks of North America. The central fact of reality for Blacks, therefore, according to Cone, is racism. Black reality means fighting to survive in a world that deems black existence an "illegitimate form of human

¹ Cone, for example, argues that Jesus was crucified because he was a threat to the political and religious authorities. Cone, Speaking the Truth, 39. Furthermore, Christ's cry on the cross was a cry of true abandonment. Idem, God of the Oppressed, 139.

² LW 31: 53; WA 1: 362.21-22 (Thesis 21, Heidelberg Disputation, 1518).

³ Cone, "Reflections from the Perspective of US Blacks," 240-241; See also, "Black Theology as Public Theology in America," 201-202.

⁴ Cone, Speaking the Truth, 48.

⁵ Ibid., 42.

⁶ Cone has a very illuminating description of who the oppressed really are in God of the Oppressed, 147-49. Elsewhere, he defines the oppressed this way: "To be oppressed means that a people's answers to questions about their identity have been imposed upon them." Cone, "Theologies of Liberation Among US Racial-Ethnic Minorities," Theologies of the Third World, Concilium 199, Leonardo Boff and Virgil Elizonda, eds. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 54.

⁷ Cone, For My People, 160.

existence."¹ His insistence that racism is the central facet of reality is not merely a social issue. It has theological implications as well: racism is a complete denial of the Incarnation.² Therefore, Black Theology labels racism as a heresy.³ Moreover, to ignore a person's colour in a racist society makes white accounts of American history the only accepted history, while the history of the oppression of blacks and their present oppression is ignored.⁴ This systematic ordering of society on the basis of racism has made the alienation of the black people inevitable.⁵

Second, to define reality involves defining what it means to be human. This, however, is also affected by racism, since it does not give equal dignity to all people. According to "white

¹ Cone, Liberation, 34-35. While he is aware of the fact that blacks are not the only ones to suffer from racism or oppression, he suggests that blackness symbolizes oppression in any society (Ibid., 12), and that it best describes what oppression is in American society. Ibid., 27.

² Cone, Black Theology, 69.

³ Cone, For My People, 81.

⁴ Cone, Black Theology, 18.

⁵ Ibid., 13. While Cone analyzes society from the perspective of racism, he does not reject other methods of social analysis. In his later works, he comes to recognize the usefulness of marxist analysis, but it does not replace race analysis. "Reflections from the Perspective of US Blacks," 243. See also his chapter on "Black Christians and Marxism," in For My People (175-88).

Cone makes the astute observation that originally Black Theology rejected marxist analysis because Blacks "wanted a part of the 'capitalistic pie'." Idem, For my People, 94. He suggests that Black Theology has come to realize that it cannot limit the black struggle to a race struggle in the United States; rather, it must move beyond its particularity and enter into solidarity with the experiences of other oppressed groups, both in the U.S. and worldwide. Idem, For My People, 173; see also his article, "Black Theology: Its Origin, Method and Relation to Third World Theologies," Festschrift: A Tribute to Dr. William Hordern, Walter Freitag, ed. (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan Press, 1985), 40-50. Furthermore, while racism, sexism and classism are inter-related (Idem, For My People, 97), his main focus is still racism. Idem, My Soul Looks Back, 115.

definitions, whiteness is 'being' and blackness is 'non-being'.¹ Cone recognizes that there is no middle ground here: either a person is treated with dignity and respect, or as less than human.²

The reality of what it means to be human is different for blacks and whites. The problem for whites is that rather than being human, they are trying to be gods. As Cone writes, ". . . the basic human sin is the attempt to be God, to take his place by ordering the societal structures according to one's political interests."³

The reality for blacks is drastically different. Their problem is not trying to become gods, but rather, trying to gain recognition as human beings rather than as animals or "non-beings"⁴ Malcolm X argues, for example, that teaching blacks to despise their very blackness

¹ Cone, Liberation, 35. Cone argues later on that whites have pursued two directions in their dealings with blacks: they have either "legally defined black people as outside the realm of humanity, decreeing that blacks were animals and that their own enslavement was best both for them and the society as a whole," or they have tried to integrate them into white society, which in reality was nothing more than trying to assimilate them. Ibid., 38-39.

² Cone, Black Theology, 23. He also defines humanity in terms of being allowed to define one's own being. Oppression, on the other hand, is to be defined, located, or set aside according to another's perspective. Idem, Liberation, 28-29, note 4.

³ Cone, Speaking the Truth, 41. The first half of this comment is almost identical to Luther's comments about Melanchthon trying to be god rather than human (LW 49: 337; WABr 5: 415.41-6. Letter to Spalatin, June 30, 1530). See also Liberation, 185.

As a result of this desire to be gods, Black Theology would argue that sin is to be defined as "whiteness--white people's desire to be God in human relations." Idem, Liberation, 193. The relative material success of white people in American society has only reinforced this false notion that they are "nearer to the gods," than the black people who live in poverty. See also Liberation, 47, 234.

⁴ Cone, Liberation, 35, 38. Cone notes, however, that before God, blacks have always been affirmed in their humanity. Blacks know that God is not colour blind, and they know that the "Oppressed One" defines what it means to be human in the midst of oppression; namely, to be fighting against oppression and all that is against one's right to become human. (Liberation, 157-59, 169).

was the worst crime of whites.¹ By despising their blackness, black people intimate that blackness and humanity are mutually exclusive. An inversion is called for, therefore, both in the mentality that supports such a view, and an inversion in the structures in society that support it. Cone suggests that such an inversion only renounces "white superiority," not their dignity and humanity.²

The struggle to gain dignity and humanity for blacks requires more than a verbal renunciation of whites, however. It involves fighting for liberation.³ The rejection of racism thus becomes a *status confessionis* of the gospel.⁴ Any interpretation of the gospel that does not understand Jesus as the liberator of the oppressed or that salvation involves liberation and the attainment of humanity, therefore, is heretical.⁵

Third, the suffering of black people is one of the stark realities of the American context.⁶ Cone states;

¹ As noted in Cone, Black Theology, 18. One of the ways in which this hatred was taught was through a constant attempt by whites to destroy the meaning and value of black history and traditions (Liberation, 37).

² Cone, Black Theology, 17.

³ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴ Cone, Liberation, 39. While Cone does not use the phrase, *status confessionis*, his approach clearly indicates such a stance. It is interesting to note that the rejection of racism was declared a *status confessionis* at the 1982 General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, which met in Ottawa, and the 1977 General Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Dar es Salaam.

⁵ Cone, God of the Oppressed, 37.

⁶ See here Rudolph R. Featherstone, "The Theology of the Cross: The Perspective of an African in America," Theology and the Black Experience: The Lutheran Heritage Interpreted by African and African-American Theologians, Albert Pero and Ambrose Moyo, eds. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 54-55. Featherstone does a masterful job of relating Black Suffering with the theology of the cross, as well as its implications for church and society.

Black Theology must take seriously the reality of black people—their life of suffering and humiliation. This must be the point of departure of all God-talk which seeks to be black-talk. When that man is black and lives in a society permeated with white racist power, he can speak of God only from the perspective of the socio-economic and political conditions unique to black people. ...Black theology knows that people can view God only through black eyes that behold the brutalities of white racism.¹

One of the major problems in dealing with black suffering revolves around the question of why they suffer and others do not. The suggestion that God would approve of suffering is rejected.² Yet suffering is a reality that must be taken seriously.³ The suffering of Christ, then, raises questions for black people:

The suffering that Christ accepted and which is promised to his disciples is not to be equated with the easy acceptance of human injustice inflicted by white oppressors. God cannot be the God of black people and also will their suffering. To be elected by God does not mean freely accepting the evils of the oppressors; but the suffering which is inseparable from the gospel is that style of existence that arises from a decision to *be* in spite of non-being. It is that type of suffering that is inseparable from freedom, that freedom that affirms black liberation despite the white powers of evil. It is suffering in the struggle for freedom.⁴

It is only when the distinction is made between these two kinds of suffering that one can deal with it constructively. The passive acceptance of human injustice is to be rejected outright and fought against, even if whites do not like it. On the other hand, blacks realize that suffering arises from any fight for justice and equality: "To assert one's freedom always involves encountering the economic and social structures of oppression."⁵ To not struggle, in this sense, is to support the

¹ Cone, Black Theology, 117.

² Cone, Liberation, 149.

³ Cone, Speaking the Truth, 12-13.

⁴ Cone, Liberation, 149.

⁵ Ibid., 176.

status quo, giving in to injustice and allowing oneself to be numbed by the pain.¹ While white people may suggest that black rejection of the status quo may lead to "unchristian" violence, Cone suggests that in reality, whites are not against all violence, but only violence against themselves.² Since the churches and their theologians have not spoken out about this unjust suffering which the blacks constantly face, they must be supporters of the white oppressors and the suffering which they inflict upon black society.³

Fourth, Cone deals with the reality of how society has handled the results of his race analysis. He has come to the conclusion that the white churches will not be "converted" by words alone or by the logic of Black Theology.⁴ It is not a truth they want to hear or to deal with, since they benefit from things the way they are. He has also come to realize that since

¹ Cone, God of the Oppressed, 183. Cone argues that the support of the status quo in American society is wrong. Idem, Liberation, 22. He further suggests that "'Law and order' is nothing but an emphasis on the stabilization of the *status quo*, which means telling blacks they cannot be black and telling whites that they have the moral and political right to see to it that black people stay in their 'place'." Idem, Liberation, 42. He later quotes a section from a speech of Hitler that speaks of the need for law and order in a very similar fashion to what the whites in America have been telling blacks. Idem, Liberation, 229.

² Cone writes, "White people are not really concerned about violence in all cases but only when they are the victims. As long as blacks are beaten and shot, they are strangely silent, as if they are unaware of the inhumanity committed against the black community. Why didn't we hear from the so-called nonviolent Christians when black people were *violently* enslaved, *violently* lynched, and *violently* ghettoized in the name of freedom and democracy?" (God of the Oppressed, 195-96). What these whites forget is the violence which their society has inflicted upon blacks (Liberation, 217).

³ Cone, For My People, 183.

⁴ Ibid., 90. Luther, too, at first felt that the Word of God alone was enough to bring about the required changes in the church and in society. He assumed that if the true gospel were preached, people would come to the obvious, correct conclusions. He could thus say that God's word does everything while he and his friends sit back and drink beer. LW: 51: 77; WA 10/III: 18-19 (March 10, 1522 Sermon at Wittenberg). Later on, however, Luther slowly comes to realize that words and sound logic are not enough when attacking those things which provide personal advantages to others. Cone comes to the same conclusion, as noted here.

"Black Theology is an expression of a people who lack political power... there is nothing the blacks can do to escape the humiliation of white supremacy except to affirm the very attribute which the oppressors find unacceptable."¹ In other words, the only option open for blacks is to partake in inversions in society, inversions which are based on the Incarnation.

There is, as Cone recognizes, a certain ambiguity in American society; even as an oppressed group, blacks are also part of a society that as a whole is an oppressor to others. The dominance and power that Americans have exerted over third world countries provides a problem for blacks fighting injustices.² The recognition of this dichotomy leads him to stress the need for solidarity with other oppressed groups in order that inversions may actually come about.

C. Application to Church and Society

In one sense, because of the emphasis Cone places on the specific context of Christ's Incarnation, and his detailed and precise focus on its implications for any definition of reality, many of the implications for church and society have already been stated. Nevertheless, there are some specific issues that Cone addresses to both church and society.

First, Cone has some specific things to say about the church. Because of their racism, an ideological distortion of the gospel,³ he labels the white denominational churches

¹ Cone, Liberation, 40.

² Cone, God of the Oppressed, 220. His involvement in the *Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians* has strengthened his call for solidarity with all oppressed peoples, both in other countries, and other minorities and oppressed groups in North America. Of special importance here are the two chapters about this in For My People, 140-174.

³ Cone, God of the Oppressed, 97. He declares that as a result of this ideological distortion, American theology is "bankrupt." Idem, Black Theology, 83.

unchristian.¹ The white churches (as well as some black churches!) have rejected the "call to the cross" and have dismissed the image of Christ as Liberator.² The real church, therefore, is not the people who support racism and separate themselves from the suffering of others. Rather, the church is "that grouping which identifies with the suffering of the poor by becoming one with them."³ The true church is where Christ is; and Christ is to be found where people are "enslaved and trampled underfoot; Christ is found suffering with the suffering; Christ is in the ghetto--there also is his church."⁴

This approach gives Cone a new definition of the church. It is no longer adequate to define the church as where the word is rightly proclaimed and the sacraments administered correctly, since such definitions are useless in the face of racism.⁵ Instead, the church must also be defined in terms of solidarity with both the Oppressed One and those who suffer.⁶ The church is to be found in the sufferings of the oppressed peoples, as symbolized by blackness.

¹ Cone, Black Theology, 69; Liberation, 25. Cf. his statement that the white churches are a manifestation of the anti-Christ. Black Theology, 73. To be racist is to fall outside the definition of church. Black Theology, 73.

² Cone, Black Theology, 80.

³ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ It must be remembered, however, that for the reformers, the right preaching of the word could not be separated from showing Christian love. Luther, for example, states that one of the marks of the church is the possession of the "holy word of God," but he does not stop there. He also stated that the "holy Christian people are externally recognized by the holy possession of the sacred cross." In other words, proclamation of the word leads to solidarity with those who suffer because of their faithfulness to the gospel. LW 41: 148, 164-65; WA 50: 628.29-630.2, 641.35-642.7 (On the Councils and the Church, 1539).

Until the white church is willing to reject its "whiteness" and own up to its racism--which it has perpetuated in society--it will continue to be against the gospel and against Christ.¹

This blindness towards racism and the bankruptcy of American theology, suggests Cone, stems from its heavy dependence on European theology. The notion that all the good theology can only come out of Europe has resulted in ignoring the American context and favouring a speculative theology instead.² Only when the oppressed and suffering in America are taken seriously by the church--resulting in solidarity with them and equality for them--will theology become a contributing force in society.³ Unless this happens, the church will continue to support the status quo rather than the gospel.

There are also some implications of Black Theology for society. The very language of theology, Cone argues, should be to challenge the structures of society by identifying consistently with the oppressed of that society.⁴ Theology is never apolitical or neutral: it acts as a chaplain to either the status quo or to the oppressed.⁵

Integration is one of the central social issues that need to be critically examined. On the one hand, Cone suggests that integration does not address the root of the problem, since it assumes that whites have something that the black people want, and that the structure of society

¹ Cone, Black Theology, 81, 72. It is interesting to note that at one point, Luther suggested that those churches who disguised evil teachings under the cover of "truth" were led by the "white devil." LW 26: 41, 49; WA 40: 96, 108 (1535 Galatians Commentary). The "white devil" was considered to be the most dangerous to the church. It is an imagery that would fit well with Cone's thought!

² Cone, Black Theology, 88.

³ Cone, Liberation, 230-32.

⁴ Ibid., 21-22.

⁵ Cone, Black Theology, 90.

as it is does not need to be changed.¹ Integration into a society that is oppressive is therefore senseless. On the other hand, Cone suggests that when white people talk about integration, what they really mean is the "destruction of black identity through assimilation."² In this case, integration is nothing more than a racist policy with genocidal overtones. True integration cannot occur, therefore, until black people are treated with respect and dignity by white people, and are accepted as equals in a society that is committed to supporting the oppressed. If there is no dignity, respect or equality, a helpful and mutually beneficial integration cannot take place. Society will continue to be a nightmare rather than a dream.

IV. CONCLUSION

Obviously, Luther did not apply his "*theologia crucis*" to the social evil of racism. In fact, because of his blatant anti-semitism,³ as well as his view that serfdom or slavery is acceptable,⁴ one could build an obvious case justifying Cone's avoidance of using Luther's

¹ Cone, Black Theology, 17.

² Cone, Liberation, 39.

³ One of the most blatant and harsh diatribes by Luther against the Jewish people is his treatise, "On the Jews and their Lies" of 1543." LW 47: 137-306; WA 53: 417-552. These totally unacceptable writings are one of Luther's greatest liabilities.

⁴ For example, see his rejection of the Third Article of the peasants, in which he writes, "This article would make all men equal, and turn the spritual kingdom of Christ into a worldly, external kingdom; and that is impossible. A worldly kingdom cannot exist without an inequality of persons, some being free, some imprisoned, some lords, some subjects, etc." LW 46: 39; WA 18: 327 (Admonition to Peace, 1525). Cf. LW 9: 145; WA 14: 655-56 (1523-1525 Lectures on Deuteronomy).

(continued...)

theology. Luther should be held accountable for his racism and support of slavery. Yet, at the same time, it must be recognized that this should not invalidate the theology of the cross. Rather, it reveals that Luther did not methodologically work through all its practical implications. Like other humans, he too, sought the security that was found in keeping things the way they were. Yet his theology of the cross was challenging and provocative for his context. It opened up the possibility of a re-reading of what scripture and tradition have to say about God and humanity's relationship to God and to one another. It is from this basis that a comparison of the theology of the cross and Black Theology has some justification.

The Black Theology as espoused by James Cone is, like the theology of the cross, very challenging and deliberately provocative. It raises many critical questions about the way in which theology has been used and abused by the "white" church; yet it has also given society a vibrant alternative vision of church based on the black experience.¹ It definitely takes the black experience in the American context seriously. It is also not without its critics. Cone himself offers a self-critique of his own earlier theology. He agrees with many of his critics that his earlier works were, to a large degree, an over-reaction to white racism rather than a theology based on black experience and black religion.² This is a valid criticism. On the other hand, one

⁴(...continued)

While some of Luther's writings about inequality are related to his two-realms theory, this does not excuse him. Nor can one say that slavery was not a part of Luther's context: the serfs' complaints to him force him to address it. He chose to support the status quo, however, of the socio-economic structures of society.

¹ In this respect, the "programme" of Black Theology is quite similar to the task of what Gregory Baum has called "critical theology." Gregory Baum, Religion and Alienation: A Theological Reading of Sociology (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 193-226.

² Cone, For My People, 86-88. His later books, beginning with The Spirituals and the Blues and God of the Oppressed, focus much more on black religion and experience.

could also say that Luther's theology of the cross was basically a reaction to the scholastic theology he had encountered, rather than a theology developed in its own right. Cone and Luther wrote contextual theologies, however, and for Cone, a large part of his context was white racism.

Second, Cone suggests that his earlier works did not contain enough social, economic, and sexist analysis.¹ The focus on a race analysis of American society predominates. In his later works, he is much more conscious of using these other forms of analysis so that the reality of society might be more clearly exposed and addressed.

A third critique of Cone's Black Theology comes from another Black Theologian, James Deotis Roberts. Roberts suggests that Cone's definition of blackness is ambiguous: sometimes it refers to the colour of skin, other times it is symbolic of the oppressed.² Again, this is a valid criticism. Which definition Cone is using at any one moment is not always clear. However, by not restricting his definition of blackness to skin colour, Cone's theology avoids being an uncritical "baptism" of all black people as members of the true Christian church. Not all black-skinned people are oppressed; some are oppressors who deny other blacks their dignity and humanity. This paradoxical definition of blackness is thus reminiscent of many of the paradoxes in Luther's theology of the cross.

In analyzing Cone's Christology from the perspective of Luther's theology of the cross, it becomes clear that there are many similarities. Both emphasize that Christ is the clearest self-revelation of God, and that this self-revelation is hidden in places or actions which are radically different from what one would expect. For God to choose to dwell among the poor and the

¹ Cone, *For My People*, 88-98.

² James Deotis Roberts, *Black Theology Today: Liberation and Contextualization*, Toronto Studies in Theology, Volume 12 (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), 39.

oppressed seems contrary to the actions of an omnipotent God. Furthermore, both Cone and Luther have quite similar understandings of faith and atonement. The recognition that God brings salvation and liberation through solidarity with us *and* through mighty acts on our behalf is found in both theologians. Although Cone defines salvation as liberation, with its obvious political and social overtones, such an idea is not totally foreign to Luther.

Luther's focus, however, remained on the theological, rather than political and social implications of Christology. In his context, it was crucial to stress the importance of God's self-revelation hidden in the Incarnate and Crucified Christ, how this Christ is central to faith, and how Christ makes one righteous before God. While Cone clearly does not discount or minimize this, he insists that the working out of such a Christology cannot occur apart from a specific historical context, which in his case, is the black experience of oppression in North America. Otherwise Christology--even an Incarnation Christology--runs the risk of being speculative: a theology of glory rather than a theology of the cross.¹ By rejecting all speculative Christology not grounded in the context of a specific, historical Incarnation of Christ, it is easy to take the next step by making the rejection of racism a *status confessionis* of the gospel. To reject the notion of God becoming incarnate to a specific oppressed group in history is to also reject the oppressed themselves. Yet such a move also raises some questions, not the least of which is what is really meant by the gospel. For Luther, it was the good news that by God's gracious actions in and through Christ, we have been made righteous in the presence of God (*coram Deo*). Right relationships between people were a result of the gospel, and a part of the realm of "natural law"

¹ In one of his references to the theology of the cross, Cone criticizes modern day Lutheran scholars (he does not name them!) who "turn the cross of Jesus into a theological idea completely unrelated to the concrete historical struggles of the oppressed for freedom. For most Lutheran scholars, the theology of the cross is a theological concept to be contrasted with philosophical and metaphysical speculations." Cone, "Black Theology as Public Theology in America," 200.

and the "worldly sphere," rather than constitutive of it.¹ For Cone, on the other hand, the gospel involves both being made righteous before God and God's actions to bring justice between each other. He reflects, therefore, an understanding of the gospel similar to that proclaimed at the 1971 Third Synod of Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church.² While there are hints of such a position in Luther, it has not reached the stage of a *status confessionis*. Further research needs to be done, however, in this area of Luther studies.

The methodological principles which Cone and Luther use also share many common characteristics. The Incarnation and cross as a starting point for doing theology is central to both, as is the need to identify the actual operating gods in society. While Luther's context is foreign to that of Cone, the conscious decision to "call a thing what it is" is present in both. Yet Cone is much more specific and persistent than Luther in applying these principles to his context. Any theology of the cross that does not also deal with the realities of life becomes nothing more than a speculative theology or a theology of glory. At this point, perhaps, Cone's Black Theology is more faithful to the tradition of the theology of the cross than was Luther. When a theology of the cross fails to take into account the context of human suffering, then it is no longer a theology of the cross. Rudolph Featherstone, a black Lutheran theologian, recognizes this when he writes;

¹ No doubt, much of this distinction can be attributed to his two-realms theory, which has already been discussed, along with its attendant problems. One problem, which is relevant here, is that such a distinction separated the world into the divine and secular spheres. Yet elsewhere, Luther seems to be at pains to prevent such a division from taking place, and actually works to desacralize religion. Cf. LW 21: 32-33; WA 32: 323-24 (1521 Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount).

² The bishops stated that "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appears to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel." 1971 Synod of Bishops, "Justice in the World," The Pope Speaks 16 (1972), 377.

Any theology, especially the theology of the cross, that does not address this ever-present communal black suffering reveals the bankruptcy and false claims of the cross for all persons. Ultimately, if the theology of the cross can ignore this situation, then it is not fit to be labelled as such and should be called what it rightly is, the theology of glory. For like Luther's theology of glory, it fails to see God in, with and through human suffering, especially black suffering.¹

While a theology of the cross must address black suffering, one of the potential dangers of Cone's theology is that suffering itself, rather than a suffering for the gospel, becomes a mark of the church. Suffering *for* the sake of the gospel is not always the same as suffering *from* policies of racism based on an "unchristian" gospel, even if the rejection of racism is a *status confessionis* of the gospel. The church, therefore, be it visible or invisible, is not always identical to the oppressed. God is indeed revealed in their midst, suffering with them and for them, but that does not mean this self-revelation is accepted or acted upon. Christ may not be wanted in their midst. One must be careful, then, in describing the actual specific context of the Incarnation. Some critics of Black Theology, for example, argue that Cone has too closely identified Christology with the historical context of black suffering.² While the Incarnation and the cross must be understood within the specific historical context of suffering, it can never be limited to or determined by that context alone.

It must be remembered that even though Cone thinks in terms similar to a theology of the cross, he does not make any parallels between his Black Theology and Luther's *theologia crucis*. Yet, if one analyzes their basic themes in both their Christological emphases and their methodological principles, their theologies are very similar, despite their vastly different historical

¹ Featherstone, "The Theology of the Cross: The Perspective of an African in America," 51.

² Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 100. While Cone admits that many of his critics correctly note that he often associates human actions with God's struggle, and that being God's elect does not entitle the oppressed to usurp God's place, he would be loathe to separate one's understanding of Christology from the historical context, as Bultmann does with his stress on the Christ of faith.

contexts. Both Luther and Cone have sought to remind a church and a society about a minority tradition of Christianity that does not blithely accept or support the status quo, but rather refers to the Incarnation and cross as the foundation for a new and down-to-earth approach to the gospel. While Cone develops his "Black Theology of the cross" more extensively and in a much more systematic and detailed fashion than does Luther, the similarities between Cone and Luther cannot be overlooked.

CONCLUSION

The similarities and differences between the contemporary theologies under consideration and Luther's theology of the cross have already been summarized in the conclusions at the end of each of the chapters. What has been revealed is that there are many similarities and points of common emphasis. This is particularly significant when one is reminded that of the four contemporary theologians which were analyzed, only one of them, namely Douglas John Hall, makes explicit use of the theology of the cross. Even though the other contemporary theologians did not consciously "borrow" or refer to Luther's theology, there are nevertheless many similarities between them. Furthermore, the results of the study of antecedents to Luther's theology of the cross in Chapter One has revealed that this "thin" or "lost tradition," as Hall calls it,¹ did not originate with Luther. Although he was the first to introduce the term, *theologia crucis*, it was not new to him. Many of the major themes which it has come to represent are found in a wide variety of earlier sources. Some of these themes are found in the medieval and, more specifically, German mystics. Others surface in some of the scholastics. Certain themes from the theology of the cross tradition are also found in some of the early church theologians such as Augustine, and later biblical commentators such as Nicholas of Lyra. The tradition goes back further than this, however: all the way to the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. So it is not something new to Luther. It existed before him, and this tradition has carried on past him. The theology of the cross is a theme in the Christian tradition rather than a theme unique to Luther or to contemporary theologians.

¹ Douglas John Hall, Lighten our Darkness: Towards and Indigenous Theology of the Cross (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 113-14.

The recognition of the history of this thin tradition and the many themes it contains is important for contemporary theologians to remember. The ever-present danger for contemporary theologians is that the past is forgotten in the quest for relevance. As Moltmann notes, however, Christian theology needs to be relevant without giving up its unique Christian identity. The two must always be kept in a mutually beneficial tension.¹

In analyzing Luther's theology of the cross and his application of it to his own context, it becomes obvious that Christology receives the main emphasis in his theology of the cross. Yet the methodology of his theology of the cross is also clearly present. In his comments on social and economic issues such as trade and usury, or in his approach to the sacraments, one gets a glimpse of some of Luther's attempts at a methodological application of the theology of the cross. One also gets a glimpse of his methodology in his approach to the peasants' war; although here he was more faithful to the Christological content aspect of the theology of the cross than he was to its methodology. At times, his response to reality as he defined it was to support the status quo of the *authorities* rather than to support the peasants' calls for inversions in society and the need for social justice. From a twentieth century perspective, it is easy to criticize Luther for his inability to see any political options other than civil authority residing in either the princes or the church hierarchy. Like other reformers within and outside of the Roman Catholic church, he preferred that civil authority be in the hands of the princes. Democracy as is now practised in many countries was not a conceivable option for him. It does not stop Jens Glebe-Möller, however, from rejecting the theory that Luther was bound by the historical limitations of his time.

¹ Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology, R. A. Wilson and John Bowden, trans. (London: SCM Press; New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 25.

As he suggests, "the peasants were able to transcend these limitations!"¹ What can be concluded, however, is that in dealing with the peasants, Luther opted for a variation of the two-realms theory which supported the status quo of the princes rather than staying with the theology of the cross and its call for inversions.

Luther's acknowledgement of the validity of the peasants' demands as outlined in the *Twelve Articles*, however, and his consequent admission that these articles were consistent with "natural law" reveals an important consideration in exploring the methodological aspects of his theology of the cross for contemporary theologies. De Roo's political theology, for example, is basically--and perhaps even deliberately--involved with the "natural law" which is a functioning principle for all society. The Christology, so important to Luther, is not as prominent, or manifestly operative, in De Roo, Smillie or Hall. Nevertheless, it is a factor in the work of De Roo and Hall, and even more so in Cone. These four contemporary theologians, then, vary in the extent of the explicitness of their Christology. On the other hand, all four contemporary theologians have developed social implications of the methodology and the methodological principles of the theology of the cross to a much greater extent than did Luther.

In studying the four contemporary theologies, it became clear that the Black Theology of James Cone had the most in common with Luther. In Cone there is an extensive development of and emphasis on both Christological content and methodology. De Roo, and to a lesser extent,

¹ Jens Glebe-Möller, *Jesus and Theology: Critique of a Tradition*, Thor Hall, trans. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 131. Glebe-Möller also criticizes Luther for not entering into solidarity with the peasants, and thus not supporting them in their quest for social justice (Ibid.). Instead, he argues, Luther relied on what he calls the "theological code." This theological code is basically the interpretation of Jesus' life and death, atonement theories, and the understanding of an "otherworld" salvation. Ibid., 38-41. However, Glebe-Möller too quickly discards much of the Christian tradition. In Moltmann's terms, Glebe-Möller's quest for relevance leads him to abandon much of the Christian identity.

Hall, also rely on the Incarnation as a starting point for doing theology. All four contemporary theologians, therefore, differ in some degree from Luther's Christology—most often in their understanding of atonement. Yet despite these differences, the Christological similarities and the more abundant methodological similarities suggest that Luther's theology of the cross has something significant to contribute to these four contemporary theologies.

I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LUTHER'S THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS FOR CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGIES

The theological content, that is, the Christology, of the theology of the cross as developed by Luther is perhaps the most significant contribution the *theologia crucis* can offer to contemporary theologies. The methodological emphases on solidarity, the need to deal with reality, living in the absence of security and guarantees, as pilgrims on the *via crucis*, are very important to contemporary theologies. Yet Luther's theology of the cross provides a lucid reminder that to be a contemporary *theology*, theological content is required. The radical themes present in the contemporary theologies lose some of their potency if their theological underpinnings are not consistent with their methodology. The Christology of Luther's theology of the cross is one of the theologies found within the Christian tradition that can provide such a theological foundation. When the theological foundation of solidarity remains undeveloped, for example, those within the church and those who are in dialogue with society may perceive that solidarity is merely one of many options in the Christian faith rather than at the heart of its

theology. Furthermore, from a study of these four contemporary theologies, it was evident that there were some possible areas of dialogue between their theological content and that of Luther. So there are grounds for further comparison.

The theological content of Luther's theology of the cross is also significant for contemporary theologies because it emphasizes that the Christian scandal which Paul mentions (1 Cor 1:18ff) is nothing else than the cross of Christ. It was central to Luther's understanding of the hidden and revealed God. It was central to his understanding of faith and atonement. The hidden and revealed God is revealed only to those with the eyes of faith, through a weak, suffering man hanging on the cross. Moreover, it is this weak and suffering Christ that acts "for us" and through grace makes us justified in the presence of God. It is not what society would expect from their God who is remote in the heavens. Yet it is precisely this God who calls people to enter into solidarity with suffering humanity and to deal with the reality of society rather than trying to avoid the "darkness." The methodology of Luther's theology of the cross, therefore, is consistent with, and follows upon his Christology.

Luther's Christological approach insists that the scandal of the cross remains the cross. He does not locate the scandal in the hellenization of Christianity, as does Hall.¹ Nor is the true scandal the church's--or society's--support of the status quo in lieu of entering into solidarity with all those who are marginalized, whether it be a result of economic policies, racism, sexism, politics, etc. While these are scandalous, in many ways they are only reflections--and consequences!--of the scandal of the cross. To recognize the scandals in society and in the church but to avoid the scandal of the cross becomes a form of a theology of glory. When

¹ Hall, Imaging God: Dominion as Stewardship Commission on Stewardship, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans; New York: Friendship Press, 1986), 224 n. 12.

people can confront the scandal of the cross and not be moved, it is unlikely that they will be moved by the scandals in society.

Luther's theme of the hidden and revealed God is also significant for contemporary theologies because it prevents people from too readily assuming that they know exactly what God's will is in society. It also acts as a deterrent to any attempts to create an idolatrous image of God, by preserving the mystery of God. While the Incarnation is the way God has chosen to be known, it does not reveal everything about God--only those things of God which God wants people to know. The revealing God is also a concealing God. The danger for contemporary theologians is that only the revelations of God are considered. This was the trap, according to Luther, that Thomas Müntzer fell into. Of the contemporary theologies studied, the approach by Smillie is closest to this danger. God has entered into solidarity with people, and has called for inversions, but there is more to the being and nature of God than what is revealed in Christ.

The approach Luther takes towards atonement can also be of significance for contemporary theology. His stress on the dual themes of "God-with-us" and "God-for-us" provides a needed balance in Christology. God indeed acts by being in solidarity with humanity, as the Incarnation so vividly illustrates. But God also acts "for us," doing precisely what humanity could not: provide liberation and salvation. When only the "God-with-us" aspect is stressed, it leaves itself open to becoming a works righteousness. As Moltmann astutely notes, the cross of Jesus must be more than a result of his actions.¹ His death was more than the result of his decision to enter into solidarity with the marginalized and his challenge for others to do the same. People need God to act for them and to deliver them; the inversions that are required

¹ Moltmann, The Crucified God, 97-8.

are something they can work towards in solidarity with one another, but they cannot ultimately bring them about themselves.

While there would be many benefits for contemporary theologies to further develop their theological content in some manner similar to that of the theology of the cross, Luther's theology of the cross also has something to contribute on the basis of its methodology. For example, the emphasis Luther placed on the Incarnation as a starting point for the theological endeavour is something that is repeated, in various degrees, in three of the contemporary theologians, namely De Roo, Hall, and Cone. This similarity allows for a point of entry between contemporary theologies and certain aspects of the Christian tradition. Furthermore, the emphasis that Luther placed on the need to deal with reality is easily appropriated in all the contemporary theologies in their quest to make Christianity relevant to the present context. It is a theme that is also present in other contemporary theologies. Gregory Baum, for example, suggests that "the first task of 'local' or 'political theology' is to explode the illusions of mainstream culture."¹ Furthermore, Karen Lebacqz's discussion about the imperfections of justice suggests one such application of Luther's recognition of human reality.² The insistence by Luther regarding the human desire to be gods is also still an issue for today. Luther's recognition that humans create many idols as the objects of their worship is still a common problem in contemporary society. People still chase after goods, riches and the obtaining of them.

Finally, Luther's theology of the cross also has something of value to contribute to an application of theology to church and society. Robert Kelly suggests that the theology of the

¹ Gregory Baum, "Introduction: The Contemporary Social Gospel." Proceedings of the 1978 Institute for Christian Life in Canada. (Toronto: 1978), 4.

² Karen Lebacqz, Justice in an Unjust World: Foundations for a Christian Approach to Justice (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987), 152.

cross must inform all church doctrines, and that it also calls "the people of congregations to make a paradigm shift from the myth of free enterprise to the story of the crucifixion."¹

II. POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS BY CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGIES TOWARDS A CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

Any contemporary theology of the cross, if it seeks to address the modern context, must of necessity move beyond the parameters of the theology of the cross as espoused by Luther. This is not necessarily to be construed as a criticism of his theology, however. Rather, it reflects the reality that Luther's task was to address a context far different from the context faced by theologians today. The church is no longer a temporal authority, at least in the way it was in Luther's time. Economics and politics are different. Injustices not even recognized in Luther's time, such as racial and sexual biases, must be addressed by any contemporary theology of the cross. To do so, modifications of Luther's theology of the cross--especially in regards to some of the methodological applications to specific contexts--need to be carried out.

One weakness which contemporary theologians have revealed in Luther's theology of the cross is its lack of application to the political and social context. All of the contemporary theologies studied here go far beyond Luther in this regard. Much could be learned from them for a contemporary theology of the cross.

¹ Robert A. Kelly, "The Necessity of the Theology of the Cross Today," Consensus 11 no. 4 (October 1985), 20-21.

One of the valuable contributions that contemporary theologies have to offer a contemporary theology of the cross is the recognized need to explore further the context of the Incarnation. They have, for example, recognized new places where the hidden and revealed God dwells. The emphasis Cone places on the need for Christ to become incarnate as a poor black person, or the emphasis by De Roo and Smillie that Christ is with the marginalized and poor, reminds theologians that Jesus did more than become incarnate among human beings; he became incarnate among an oppressed, despised, and marginalized people. This emphasis on the incarnation has led to a more obvious stress on solidarity as well. In fact, this emphasis on solidarity greatly expands the understanding of solidarity which Luther had, and it must be an important theme in any contemporary theology of the cross. As Kelly notes, "carrying your cross is not putting up quietly with the minor traumas of everyday life. It is a specific act of solidarity with the victims of the powers of this world."¹ The only caution offered in this regard is that the emphasis on solidarity, which also reinforces the atonement theme of "God-with-us," must not discard the complementary theme of "God-for-us." Luther's careful attention to keeping these in balance is important to remember.

One of the most important themes that arose from the four contemporary theologies studied was the recognition of the corporate nature of sin. Sin exists in social structures, apart from the individual sins of people within those structures. This is something that Luther did not focus on, even though he perceived the individual only within the context of community. Yet the structural aspect of sin is an essential factor in any attempt to deal honestly with reality. Sin--and grace!--cannot be defined only in terms of the individual.

¹ Kelly, "The Necessity of the Theology of the Cross," 21.

The need for a social, class, racial, sexual, and economic analysis to determine the reality of society is also an important contribution which contemporary theologies can make to a theology of the cross. The realities of society cannot be faced honestly unless they are brought out into the open. While Luther did a commendable job of theological analysis by determining society's operative theologies and images of God, his attempts at social analysis were very rudimentary. Cone's work in particular reminds theologians that various forms of analysis must be done together. It is not enough to do only a class analysis, or a racial analysis; they are all needed in order to define the whole. Racism and sexism have various economic and political determinative factors.

These contemporary theologies also reveal the need for a healthy scepticism towards all human ideologies that promise utopias, or which provide benefits for only certain segments of society. While Luther was sceptical of Müntzer's theological vision of utopia, he did not deal with secular ideologies. As Kelly notes, "What Luther does not seem to realize, and what we must assert today, is that just as the cross is God's critique of all human religion, so it is also God's critique of human ideology."¹ Yet its critique of all ideologies does not mean that theology should isolate itself from social analysis. Again, Kelly describes it concisely:

While the *theologia crucis*' critique of ideology is primarily a theological critique, it must be fully conversant with political and social philosophy and with the fields of sociology and anthropology. The critique of ideology involves the theologian with cultural worldviews and social systems in a way that demands the full integration of theology with the social scientific disciplines for adequate social analysis.²

¹ Kelly, "The Necessity of the Theology of the Cross," 18.

² *Ibid.*, 19.

Another contribution contemporary theologies can make to a theology of the cross is their recognition that there are limits to using a specifically Christian theology to address the contemporary context. For this reason, De Roo does not dwell on the theological implications of the need for solidarity, but rather focuses on morals and ethics, which in theological terms, are a part of "natural law" rather than a specifically "Christian law." Contemporary theologies, then, need to address the right and the role of Christian theology to address society. To use a theology of the cross—or any specific theological approach, for that matter—could be taken to imply that the purpose in using it is to impose Christianity on the whole of society. Such assumptions would be ill-founded, however. Rather, the purpose of the theology of the cross is to assist the church in facing up to the realities of society from a perspective within its own tradition. It is a hermeneutic by which the church is able to view society, not a hermeneutic for society to view itself, even though many of the methodological principles have points of contact with social analysis. That would disregard what the theology of the cross has to say. It calls people in the church to give up the dominant, but false, gods of society (and the power and dominance themes which are party to it), in favour of the God who calls us to enter the uncertain future, without all the answers, and without a false attitude of superiority. A theology of beggars, after all, is not a theology that imposes itself on society and demands its own way. Even if it were to attempt such a thing, it would not be taken seriously. The cross is not the throne from which conquering forces operate. Its power is disputed because it is found hidden in weakness and solidarity, rather than in an imposing force.

Luther would not have wanted the theology of the cross to become some method or approach that offers theological security or which defines reality in a way that settles everything. Rather, it reveals an attitude; a way of living out one's faith in this world. The only certainty

available is the steadfast love and mercy of God, offered freely to those who trust their very being to this mysterious, hidden yet revealed God in our midst. If any contemporary theology has this attitude or approach, it will provide a useful theological basis for a meaningful dialogue with the present context which it encounters. With this attitude, a contemporary theology will not be the "official religion" of society, but it will be a theology that can assist Christians to face the reality of society honestly and openly.

Arising out of this discussion over the role and the right of theology to address social issues is the question of whether a dialogue between church and society can actually happen. Each of the contemporary theologians clearly feel that such a dialogue is needed. One wonders, however, whether the church will listen to these voices. Are their concerns and questions addressed or acted upon by the church, let alone society? Has the church made any movement toward becoming an *ecclesia crucis*, or has it preferred to remain an *ecclesia gloriae*? Does not the church have to get its own house in order before it can speak to society? De Roo, Smillie, Hall, and Cone all suggest, however, that both must be addressed simultaneously. The church, like individuals, will always be *simul iustus et peccator*. As beggars, moreover, contemporary theologies of the cross must address people from the position of solidarity and caring for creation, rather than from a position of power and authority.

III. AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

There are many possible areas of research that are related to Luther's theology of the cross and its significance for contemporary theology. This study of Luther's theology of the

cross, and its significance for the four contemporary theologies that were analyzed only provides an introduction to some of the strengths and weaknesses for such an endeavour. This study has revealed, however, at least two main directions for further study. First, additional research needs to be done on Luther's theology of the cross. It has not received the attention that it deserves. More historical and theological research into the antecedents of the theology of the cross is needed. For example, the relationship between Luther and both Nicholas of Lyra and Nicholas of Cusa have not received sufficient attention. Luther's relationship with Staupitz also needs to be explored in terms of additional themes which Luther borrowed from him in his own theological development.

A second area of Luther research requiring further attention is a historical examination of Luther's application of the theology of the cross throughout his life. For example, it would be interesting to trace the changes in Luther's understanding of the role of authorities and the right of people to oppose higher authorities. Does Luther eventually come to emphasize the need for inversions more than the need to support the status quo in later life? Did his rejection of the peasants' demands in 1525 mean that his emphasis on solidarity becomes subdued later on, or does it have a hollow ring from this point onward? These are but a few of the directions which future Luther research might explore.

In terms of future areas of research involving the significance of the theology of the cross for contemporary society, five possibilities immediately come to mind; ecumenical and interfaith dialogue; feminist and liberation theologies; native spirituality; the emergence of ecological and creation theologies, and the life of the local church.

The ecumenical movement has begun to look at the hermeneutical possibilities of the theology of the cross as a resource for ecumenical and interfaith dialogues.¹ Many of the initial studies in this area are attracted to the attitude of humility and its rejection of taking positions of power and authority that are implicit in the theology of the cross. As revealed in the suggestions of Douglas Hall, however, the common approach is to borrow the methodology of the theology of the cross while ignoring its Christological themes. While such an approach does allow for a greater amount of freedom in dialogue, one must wonder if the scandal of the cross, so dramatically highlighted in Luther's Christology, has been removed. In Moltmann's terms, does the quest for relevance and identity with other faith traditions come at the cost of ignoring the unique Christian identity which the theology of the cross upholds? While a theology of the cross provides some amenable methodological principles for dialogue, it also insists on keeping before us the scandal of the cross as that which reveals the Christian identity.

Second, further research also needs to be done into the possible significance of a theology of the cross for feminist and other liberation theologies. Some points of contact between a theology of the cross and feminist and liberation theologies have been already mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation. Further investigation is needed, since very little has been done to make conscious connections between the theology of the cross and these theologies. No doubt

¹ Joseph E. Verduyssen has begun to explore this theme in a specific way in his article, "Luther's Theology of the Cross: Its Relevance for Ecumenism," Centro Pro Unione Bulletin 35 (Spring, 1989), 2-11, 19. See also the essays by Paul Varo Martinson, Carl E. Braaten, Theodore M. Ludwig, and Simon S. Maimela in J. Paul Rajashekar, ed., Religious Pluralism and Lutheran Theology, LWF Report 23/24 (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1988). See also Harold Wells, "The Holy Spirit and the Theology of the Cross: Significance and Dialogue," Theological Studies 53 no. 3 (September 1992), 476-92. On the other hand, other scholars would suggest that the theology of the cross is unlikely to play any part in the ecumenical movement, since the churches who are involved in dialogue are still caught up in a theology of glory, which they have little desire to abandon. For example, see the article by Karl Wenggenroth, "The Theology of the Cross," Concordia Theological Quarterly 46 no. 4 (October 1982), 267-68.

this is partially due to different *Sitz-im-leben*, and partially due to the difficulties that arise in Luther's perspective on the role of women and his understanding of salvation, which did not stress the theme of liberation from oppression in this world in the way that liberationists would like.

A third area of further research is the possible significance of the theology of the cross for native spirituality. The role of the theology of the cross in interfaith dialogues could provide some guidelines in the dialogue between Christianity and Native Spirituality. It would also be interesting to explore the relationship between the early missionaries in North America and the Indigenous peoples. In what ways was the theology which the missionaries proclaimed a theology of glory rather than a theology of the cross? Would a missionary approach based on a theology of the cross have fared any better? Can a theology of the cross provide a foundation for a new approach to dialogue? These are only a few of the multitude of questions that could be addressed by further research.

A fourth area in which a theology of the cross may provide a significant contribution to contemporary theology is in the area of the newly developing ecological theology. The conflicts and problems connected with the traditional understanding of what the author of Genesis meant by admonishing humans to have dominion over the earth has come under severe criticism in the past few years. Ernest L. Simmons, Jr. has begun to raise some questions about the possible relationships between creation and the theology of the cross, but it is only a very tentative step into this area.¹ Hall's work on the issue of stewardship, which relies to a certain degree on the

¹ Ernest L. Simmons, Jr., "Creation in Luther's Theology of the Cross," *Dialogue* 30 (Winter 1991), 50-58.

methodology of a theology of the cross, also provides some possible points of entry into this challenging area of research.¹

Fifth, further exploration needs to be done on the role a theology of the cross plays in the life of the church. After all, theology is to be done for the church. Do the local churches follow a theology of the cross or a theology of glory in their liturgy, hymns and preaching? How would a theology of the cross affect counselling and visitation practices? If the cross does indeed "test everything," then what do the test results reveal about the church's life and practices? The possibilities for further research in this field seem endless.

One of the motivating factors in both the contemporary theologies studied and those which have been suggested as possible dialogue partners with a theology of the cross is the feeling that things are not the way they should be. Both a theology of the cross and these contemporary theologies have attempted to address this realization. In that sense, they are partners in the ongoing theological endeavour. They have attempted to keep the Christian tradition relevant without destroying its unique Christian identity in a society where it is a minority voice. The theology of the cross as Luther expounded it can be a valuable resource in this endeavour. It is not surprising, therefore, that the theology of the cross does, and can, have significance for any contemporary theologies which seek to have something worthwhile to say to the church and to society while not discarding its distinct Christian identity rooted in the cross of Christ.

¹ Hall, Imaging God. See also his works, Thinking the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989), 219ff; and Lighten our Darkness: Towards an Indigenous Theology of the Cross (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 92-106.

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